

BBC

THE MADCAP PARIS OLYMPICS

The chaos that nearly derailed the 1900 Games



HISTORY

MAGAZINE

BRITAIN'S BESTSELLING HISTORY MAGAZINE

August 2024 / www.historyextra.com

**BEHIND
THE NEWS**

**SEVEN
ELECTIONS
THAT SHOOK
BRITAIN**

CRUSADER CRIMINALS

Why medieval knights went
rogue in the Holy Land

**Rome's road to
global domination**

How highways transformed
the ancient world

**The dark side of
Robert the Bruce**

**Britain's kitchen
revolution**

How social change has
shaped our cooking habits



Secrets of Cromwell's spymasters

The 17th-century agents who smashed royalist plots

Heythrop Park Hotel



Russell Kane

Writer and comedian

RadioTimes

Comedy weekend at



For the first time ever, Warner Hotels has teamed up with *Radio Times* to offer you an exciting weekend getaway full of fabulous comedy fun.

Enjoy a three-night stay at the gorgeous **Heythrop Park Hotel**, where you'll see **Russell Kane**, **David O'Doherty** and **Hal Cruttenden** take to the stage, as well as fantastic performances from the all-star **Austenatious** cast and a DJ set from **Jenny Powell**. What's more, delicious breakfasts, three-course dinners, daily activities and nightly entertainment are included in the package, too.

Heythrop Park Hotel

13-16 September



WARNERLEISUREHOTELS

To find out more and book your break with Warner Hotels, visit warnerhotels.co.uk/radiotimes



David O'Doherty

Comedian and author



Hal Cruttenden

Comedian and actor



Austenatious

An improvised Jane Austen novel



Jenny Powell

TV and radio presenter

“ This month’s issue is published on the same day as the UK general election and by the time many of you are reading this the result may already be known. Elections are historic moments and their outcomes have often represented or reflected significant shifts in the country’s trajectory. In this month’s *Conversation* section, historian Richard Toye highlights what he believes are **seven of the most consequential results from our past** – and do feel free to write in with your own choices too. His piece is on page 11 and it’s followed by an article from Sarah Richardson, which examines the impact of opinion polls on our political history.

History will also be made in the sporting arena this summer as the Olympic Games arrives in the French capital. It will be the third time that Paris has hosted the Summer Games and I expect that it will be worlds apart from the first of those occasions, back in 1900. For, as David Goldblatt reveals in his article on page 46, **the 1900 Olympics was beset with chaos and confusion**, to the extent that it took almost a century to determine what the final medal table was.

Finally, our cover feature this month takes us back to the **violence of the crusader era**. These medieval campaigns were bloody in themselves, but, as Steve Tibble highlights, they also unleashed a crimewave in the Middle East as disinhibited armed young men menaced the region. Turn to page 24 to discover the full story.

I hope you enjoy the issue.

Rob Attar

Editor



THREE THINGS I'VE LEARNED THIS MONTH

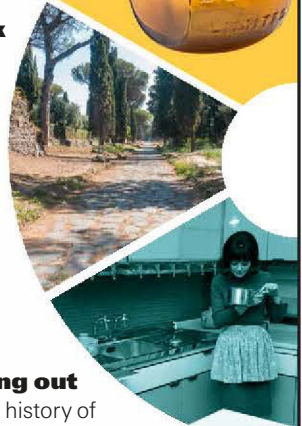
1. Cow about that

Little about Bovril suggests science-fiction, so I was surprised to discover that the name for this beef extract was actually inspired by a sci-fi novel from 1871 (page 37).



2. Take a break

I was interested to learn in our interview with Catherine Fletcher that the Romans introduced an ancient form of motorway service station where you could bathe and change horses (page 70).



3. Chilling out

In our feature on the history of kitchens, I was intrigued to find out that in 1959 only 13 per cent of UK households owned a fridge – it would rise to over 50 per cent within a decade (page 44).

THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS



Catherine Fletcher

“Part of the story of Roman roads is as a space for dreaming and imagining. Writer after writer has used the metaphor of treading in the dust of the ancients, and walking in their footsteps allows us to imbibe Roman culture in a way that reading a book simply doesn’t.”

Catherine discusses Roman roads on page 70



Onyeka Nubia

“Avebury has always been a place of fascination for me, reminiscent of a Wessex fairy tale. And yet there is also disappointment that some aspects of England’s past have clearly been better preserved than others.”

Onyeka explores the beauty of Avebury, and its neglect by past generations, on page 86



Deborah Sugg Ryan

“The kitchen has been subject to change more than any other room. Often changing location and size as well as design, it reflects the evolving roles of women, class and social customs.”

Deborah traces the rise of the fitted kitchen on page 40



Sarah Richardson

“History tells us that as long as there have been elections there have been attempts to survey voters to predict the outcome. Opinion polls have largely accurately foretold results, but everyone remembers the times they have not. That is why they are so important.”

Sarah charts the history of opinion polls on page 16

Contact us

PHONE

Subscriptions & back issues
03330 162115

Editorial 0117 300 8699

EMAIL

Subscriptions & back issues
www.buysubscriptions.com/contactus

Editorial historymagazine@historyextra.com

POST

Subscriptions & back issues
BBC History Magazine,
PO Box 3320, 3 Queensbridge,
Northampton, NN4 7BF. Basic
annual subscription rates:
UK: £90.87, EU overseas: £120,
USA: \$168.87, AUS/NZ: AU\$180
ROW: \$136

In the **US/Canada**:
 Immediate Media, PO
Box 401, Williamsport,
PA 17703; buysubscriptions.com/contactus; Toll-free
888-941-5623

CONTENTS

AUGUST 2024

FEATURES

24 Crusader criminals

Steve Tibble shows how soaring rates of murder and theft followed in the wake of waves of armed young men arriving in the Middle East

31 Cromwell's postal spies

Nadine Akkerman and Pete Langman reveal the techniques employed to open and decrypt private letters in the 16th and 17th centuries

40 Britain's kitchen revolution

Deborah Sugg Ryan explains how the evolution of our cooking habits reflected changes in women's social status

46 The madcap Olympics

David Goldblatt tells the story of the 1900 Paris Games, where chaos and confusion triumphed

54 Five fascinating facts about... medieval England

Hannah Skoda shares surprising facets of life in the Middle Ages

58 The dark side of Robert the Bruce

Fiona Watson uncovers the brutal truth about Scotland's national hero

64 Poland's powerhouse agent

Clare Mulley introduces Elżbieta Zawacka, the fearless wartime resistance operative codenamed Zo

EVERY MONTH

6 Anniversaries

The Conversation

- 11 Elections that shocked Britain
- 16 How polling has shaped politics
- 19 **Michael Wood** on the global importance of Indian democracy
- 20 **Hidden Histories**

22 Letters

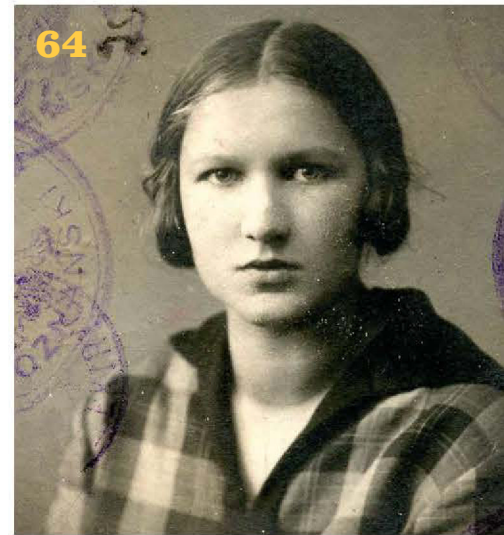
- 36 **Q&A** History questions answered

Books

- 70 **Interview:** Catherine Fletcher discusses the creation and legacy of the Roman road network
- 74 New history **books reviewed**

Encounters

- 80 **Diary:** Things to see and do this month
- 86 **Explore:** Avebury, Wiltshire
- 88 **Prize crossword**
- 90 **My history hero**
Ruby Turner on groundbreaking singer Sister Rosetta Tharpe



46



11

MORE FROM US

SUBSCRIBE

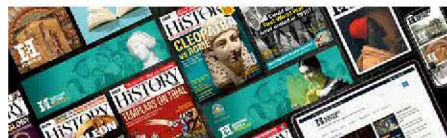
SAVE WHEN YOU
SUBSCRIBE TODAY

See page 56 for details



ENGAGE

BBC HISTORY
EXTRA



historyextra.com

The website of *BBC History Magazine* is filled with exciting content on British and world history, and includes an extensive archive of magazine content.

Social media

[X @historyextra](#) [Facebook historyextra](#) [Instagram @historyextra](#)

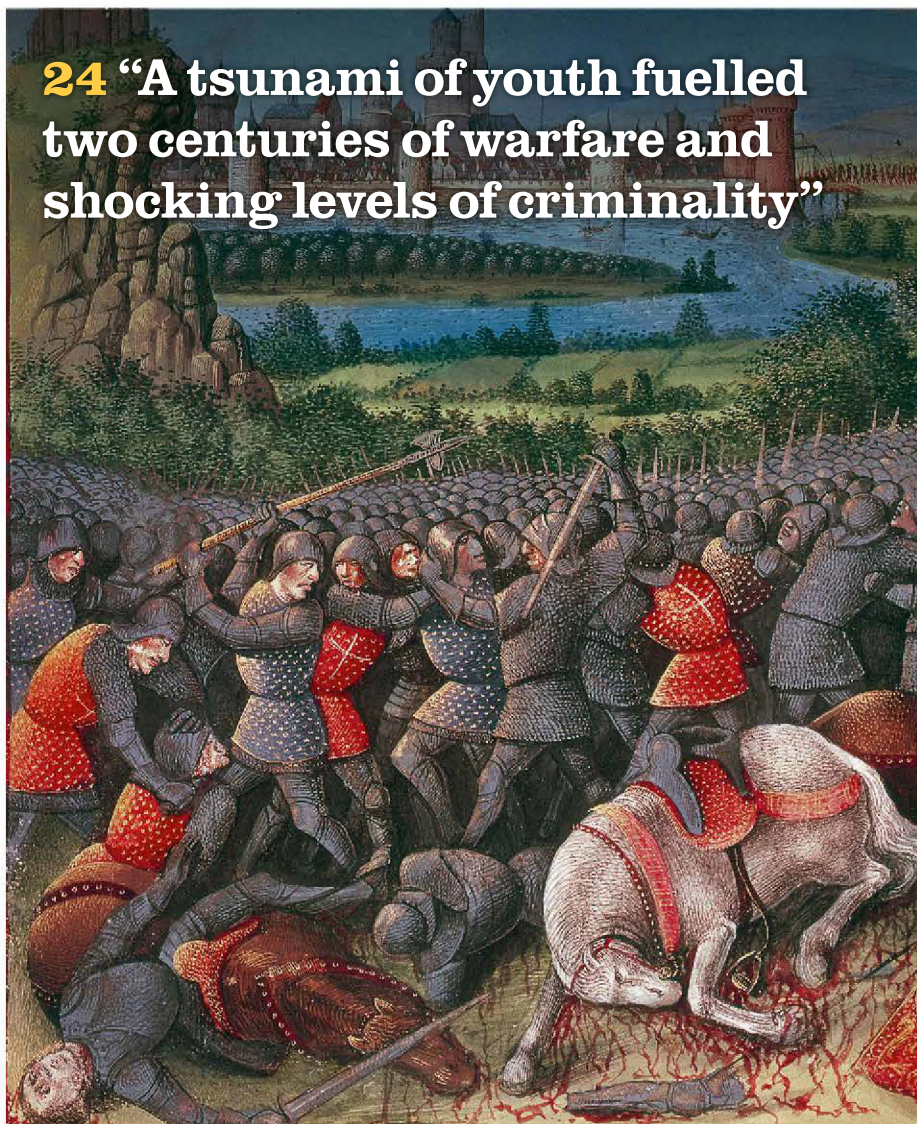
LISTEN



Our award-winning podcast is released six times a week. Why not check it out today, and explore our archive of more than 2,000 previous episodes. Download episodes for free from all major podcast providers, or via [historyextra.com/podcast](https://www.historyextra.com/podcast)

USPS Identification Statement BBC HISTORY (ISSN 1469-8552) (USPS 024-177) August 2024 is published 13 times a year under licence from BBC Studios by Immediate Media Company London Limited, Vineyard House, 44 Brook Green, Hammersmith, London W6 7BT, UK. Distributed in the US by NPS Media Group, 2 Enterprise Drive, Suite 420, Shelton, CT 06484. Periodicals postage paid at Shelton, CT and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to BBC HISTORY MAGAZINE, PO Box 37495, Boone, IA 50037-0495.

ALAMY/BRIDGEMAN/THE COLLECTION OF GENERAL ELZBIETA ZAWACKA FOUNDATION/GETTY IMAGES



24 “A tsunami of youth fuelled two centuries of warfare and shocking levels of criminality”



31

58



ANNIVERSARIES

DANNY BIRD highlights events that took place in August in history

21 AUGUST 1831

Nat Turner launches a bloody rebellion

An uprising of enslaved people kills dozens across Virginia

In the early hours of a summer morning in 1831, Nathaniel ('Nat') Turner – an enslaved preacher and self-styled prophet – launched the bloodiest slave revolt in US history.

The idea had been fermenting in Turner's mind since 12 February, when he saw a solar eclipse as an omen. When the sun over Virginia turned bluish-green on 13 August, he was convinced it was a divine signal to prepare for rebellion.

Turner and his co-conspirators, also enslaved black men, first killed Joseph Travis, his family and a hired hand as they slept. Over the following 18 hours or so the rebel band swelled in numbers, embarking on a deadly rampage through Southampton County, Virginia, slaughtering at least 55 white men, women and children. Turner aimed to capture the armoury at the county seat, Jerusalem (now Courtland), before fleeing into the Great Dismal Swamp to evade capture. However, the plan was stymied by poor discipline and a failure to spark a wider conflagration.

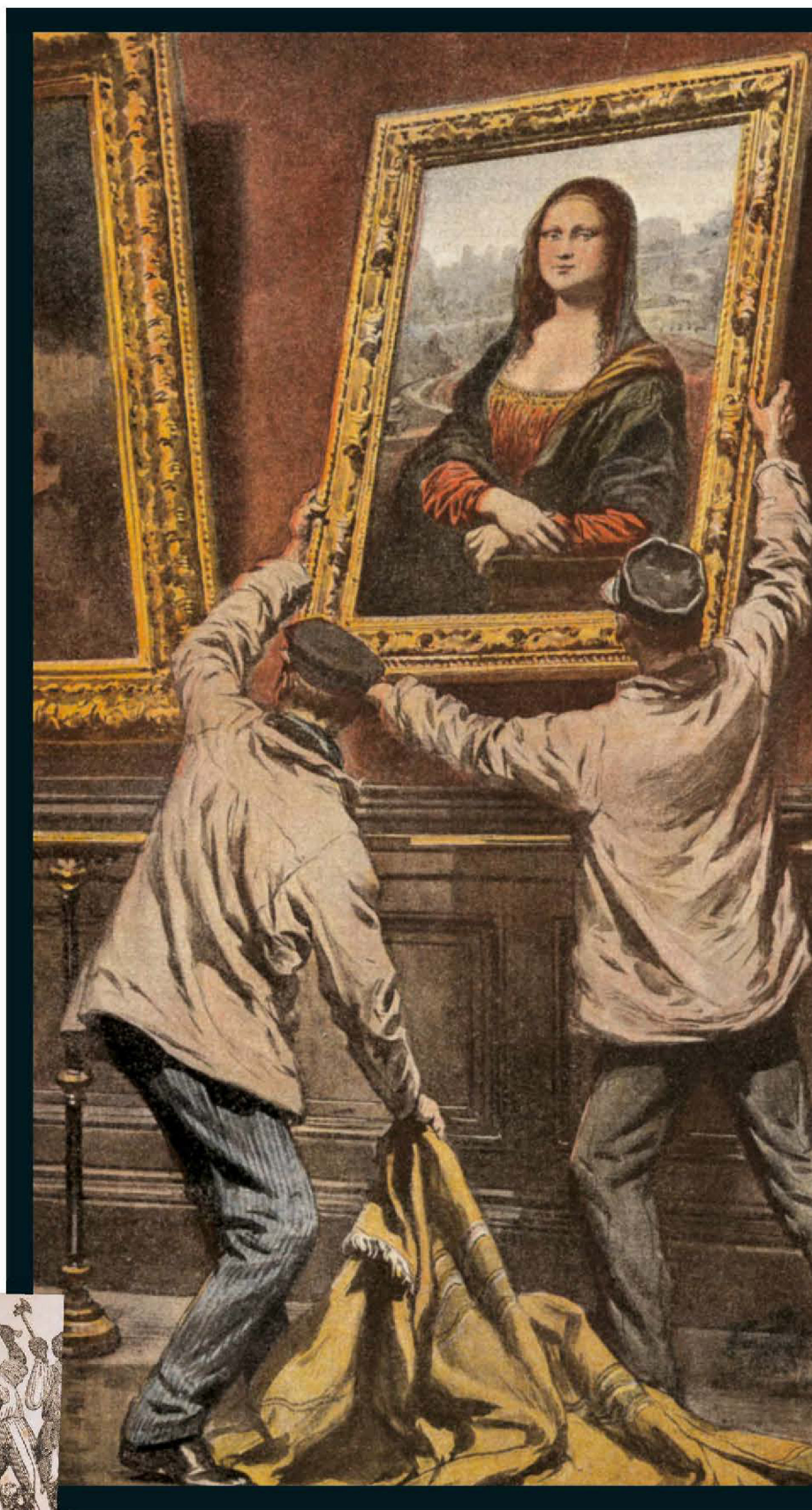
The uprising soon faced armed local resistance, and was crushed when the 3,000-strong state militia approached Jerusalem. Retaliation followed swiftly: scores of innocent enslaved people were lynched. Turner was apprehended on 30 October, then was tried and hanged on 11 November. Trials presided over by slaveholding judges resulted in the execution of 18 more accused rebels.

The revolt shattered the belief that enslaved people were too servile to rebel, prompting a fierce legislative backlash across the South. New laws prohibited the education, movement and assembly of enslaved people, and cemented pro-slavery sentiments that persisted until the Civil War.

An illustration in an 1831 account of Nat Turner's rebellion depicts "Mr Travis, cruelly murdered by his own Slaves"



GETTY IMAGES/LAMY/TOPFOTO



The conquest of Mexico by Cortés's forces, as depicted by a Spanish artist around the turn of the 18th century



13 AUGUST 1521

Spanish Conquistadors led by Hernán Cortés capture the Aztec capital city of Tenochtitlán (now Mexico City), toppling the Mesoamerican empire after weeks of intense fighting – a turning point in the Spanish colonisation of the Americas.

21 AUGUST 1911

The Mona Lisa disappears

An Italian 'patriot' steals the Renaissance artwork

On a quiet Monday morning in central Paris, three unassuming men stepped out of the Louvre's doors carrying a large parcel. The following day, pandemonium swept through the palatial museum and, according to *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*: "Every keeper, sub-keeper, or deputy-assistant-keeper [was] summoned to a council of war".

Back in 1911, Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, today arguably the world's best-known painting, wasn't particularly famous. But then a gallery visitor spotted that it had vanished and the world's press was suddenly awash with speculation. The police leapt into action – but to no immediate avail.

It was no sophisticated art thief who had pulled off the heist but an Italian handyman and petty criminal, Vincenzo Peruggia, who had previously worked at the Louvre. At closing time on 20 August, he and his accomplices had concealed themselves inside a closet. Early next morning, Peruggia unhooked the painting from the wall, removed it from its frame and wrapped his smock around that enigmatic smile before stepping outside. He then hid the *Mona Lisa* – then known in France as *La Joconde* – in his Paris apartment.

Though questioned by police, Peruggia was not considered a prime suspect – but an up-and-coming Pablo Picasso and writer Guillaume Apollinaire were accused.

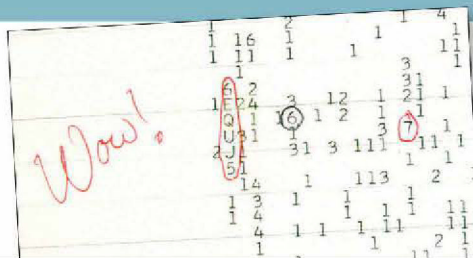
More than two years later, Italian art dealer Alfredo Geri received a letter from Peruggia offering to sell the *Mona Lisa*. After the painting was authenticated, Geri tipped off authorities. Peruggia was apprehended in Florence on 11 December 1913, and served seven months in jail for the theft. He claimed that the painting had been stolen by Napoleon, and that his patriotic aim was to 'restore' the painting to Italy.

After being exhibited in Italy, the *Mona Lisa* returned to the Louvre, her misadventures enhancing her allure and global renown.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The theft of the *Mona Lisa*, as imagined in a 1911 issue of the Italian newspaper *La Domenica del Corriere*; a police mugshot of thief Vincenzo Peruggia, taken two years before his infamous heist; guards flank the painting in Florence after its recovery in 1913; crowds admire *La Joconde* on her return to Paris

Astronomer Jerry Ehman was so astonished by this 1977 radio signal that he labelled the printout 'Wow!'



15 AUGUST 1977

Ohio State University's Big Ear radio telescope **detects the 'Wow!' signal**, apparently emanating from the direction of Sagittarius in deep space. The origin of the narrowband anomaly, which sparked speculation about extraterrestrial intelligence, remains unexplained.



18-19 AUGUST 1612

Pendle 'witches' are tried and convicted

Dark accusations destroy families in Lancashire

When nine-year-old Jennet Device entered the courtroom in Lancaster Castle, she was greeted by the spectacle of her mother, Elizabeth, screaming at her. Regaining her composure once the inconsolable woman had been removed, Jennet delivered her testimony.

"My mother is a witch and that I know to be true," Jennet claimed. "I have seen her spirit in the likeness of a brown dog, which she calls Ball. The dog did ask what she would have him do, and she answered that she would have him help her to kill."

Having doomed her mother with this shocking statement, the girl then went on to condemn her brother and sister. The Devices were just three victims of assizes that together became known as the Pendle witch trials, in which 12 people living around Pendle Hill in Lancashire were accused of witchcraft and murder.

This was part of a much wider moral panic that saw early 17th-century Lancashire thrust into the eye of the storm. Fear of witchcraft was rife across much of Europe in this period. Village 'healers' had long been consulted

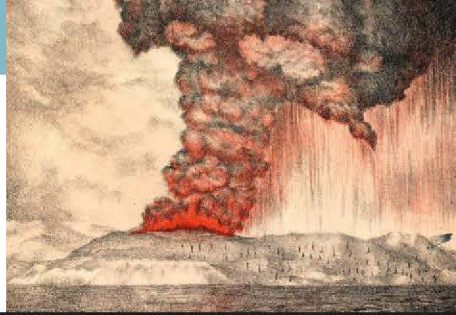
about everyday ailments, but the paranoia of England's new monarch had lately instilled a climate of suspicion. James VI & I was so obsessed with the imagined threat posed by witchcraft that he had even written a book advising the best means for rooting it out. Notably, *Daemonologie*, published in 1597, asserted that "children, women and liars can be witnesses over high treason against God".

At the heart of the Pendle witch trials was a feud between two families headed by renowned local healers. Widowed matriarchs Elizabeth Southerns and Anne Whittle, known respectively as 'Old Demdike' and 'Mother Chattox', became prime targets for the era's prejudices.

Months before the trial, Old Demdike's granddaughter Alizon Device had admitted cursing a pedlar along a road in the borough

27 AUGUST 1883

The erupting volcano Krakatoa explodes between Sumatra and Java with a roar heard thousands of miles away. The cataclysmic event causes devastating tsunamis and spews ash into the upper atmosphere, dramatically affecting weather around the world.



A lithograph of the 1883 eruption of Krakatoa – one of the deadliest in history, killing some 36,000



ILLUSTRATION BY BECCA THORNE

of Pendle; he fell, apparently now lame. Though the man likely suffered a stroke, this episode convinced the pious local magistrate, Roger Nowell, that devilry was afoot in the area. Under interrogation, Alizon denounced her grandmother and several members of Chattox's family as engaging in witchcraft.

Several individuals from both families were then incarcerated. Old Demdike died within Lancaster Castle's squalid Well Tower before the main trials began at the Lancaster Assizes on 18 August 1612. Rumours that several deaths in recent years had been the result of dark magic, alongside several defendants' confessions, led the court to come to a predictable verdict.

On 20 August, 10 of those found guilty of witchcraft were hanged on Gallows Hill (now in Williamson Park), overlooking Lancaster.

SHUTTERSTOCK/ALAMY



Displaced Greek Cypriots gather at the British military base at Dhekelia following the Turkish invasion

16 AUGUST 1974

Cyprus is divided in two

A 'Green Line' separates Greek and Turkish islanders

After weeks of turmoil, culminating in a Turkish invasion of Cyprus, the Mediterranean island was formally divided. A 112-mile-long buffer zone, policed by the United Nations and commonly known as the Green Line, now separated Turkish Cypriots in the north from Greek Cypriots in the south. Nicosia, the island's ancient capital, was cleft in two.

Communal violence first erupted on the island in 1963, just three years after Cyprus gained independence from British rule. That December, as disorder threatened to engulf the republic, Major-General Peter Young, head of the British peacekeeping force, scribbled a ceasefire line across a map of Cyprus using a green chinagraph pencil – hence 'Green Line'.

By 1974, events had escalated into a major international crisis. On 15 July, the Cyprus National Guard ousted the government of Archbishop Makarios III in a military coup. The putschists aspired to achieve *enosis* (union) with Greece – anathema to Turkish Cypriots,

whose dream of *taksim* (division), proposed a solution of two states co-existing on the island.

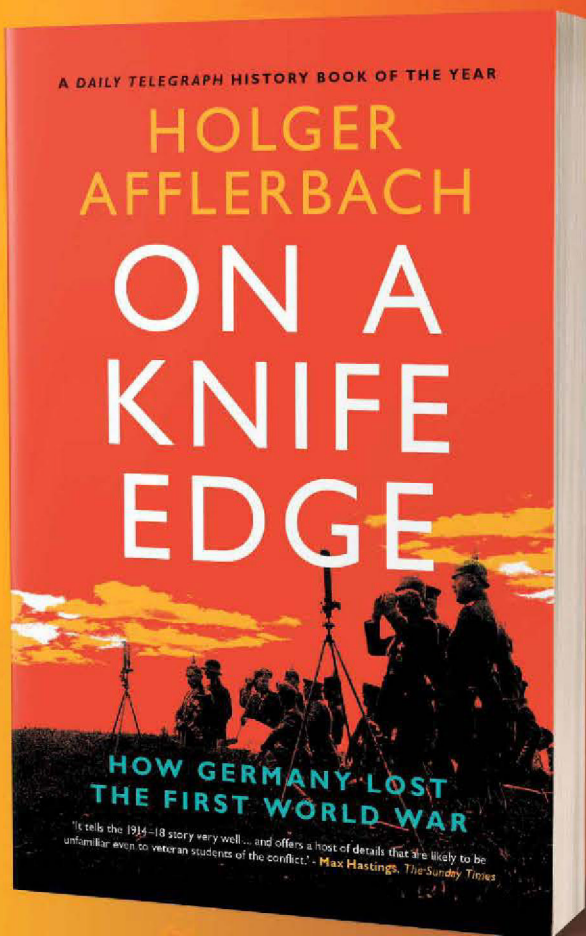
Five days after the coup, Turkish troops landed at Pentemili beach on the northern coast. Fighting erupted across Cyprus, prompting the foreign secretaries of the UK, Greece and Turkey to convene in Geneva.

The following month, while peace talks continued, Turkey proceeded to occupy approximately 37 per cent of Cyprus north of the Green Line. By the time a ceasefire finally took effect on 16 August, thousands of people had been displaced and entire villages abandoned on both sides of the new border.

Turkish Cypriots subsequently proclaimed the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus – a state whose existence is not recognised by the United Nations, but only by Turkey.

The island of Cyprus remains divided by the Green Line to this day. **1**

Danny Bird is staff writer on BBC History Magazine



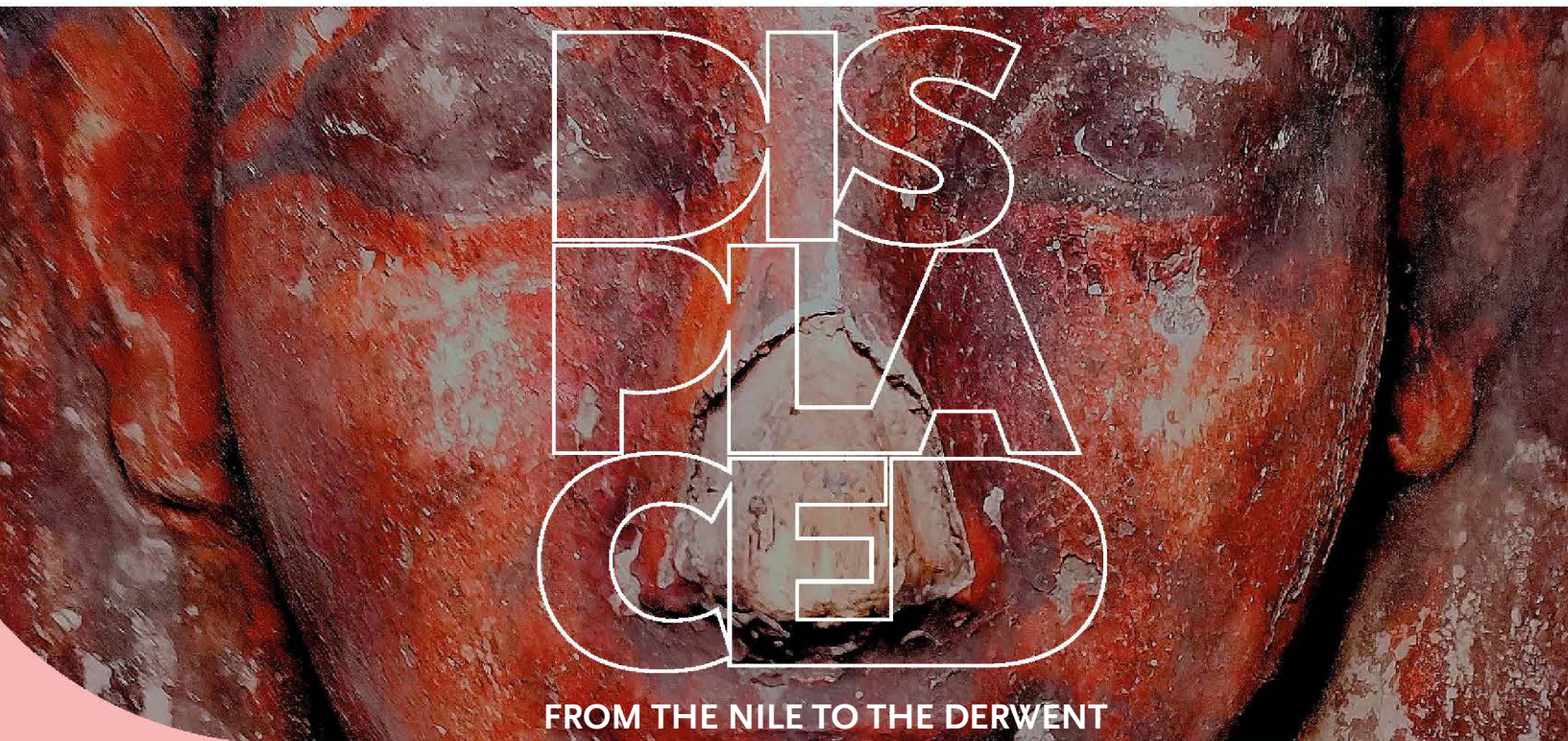
“Thought-provoking and sure to spark controversy – this is one of the most important and exciting new interpretations of the First World War!”

ALEXANDER WATSON,
author of *Ring of Steel: Germany and Austria–Hungary at War, 1914–1918*

9781108965866 | £18.99 | Paperback | July 2024
cambridge.org/OnAKnifeEdgePB



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS



Derby's Egyptian collection re-examined in a thought-provoking exhibition, enhanced by loans from national museums

Derby Museum and Art Gallery

5 July – 24 November 2024

£5 for ages 18 and over, FREE for under 18s

derbymuseums.org | 01332 641901 |



THE CONVERSATION

EXPERTS DISCUSS HISTORY'S BIGGEST ISSUES



ILLUSTRATION BY **HUGH COWLING**

BEHIND THE NEWS

Seven elections that rocked Britain

As the country goes to the polls, **RICHARD TOYE** explores the most consequential general elections in British history – from the bitter battle of 1832 to Thatcher's 1979 triumph

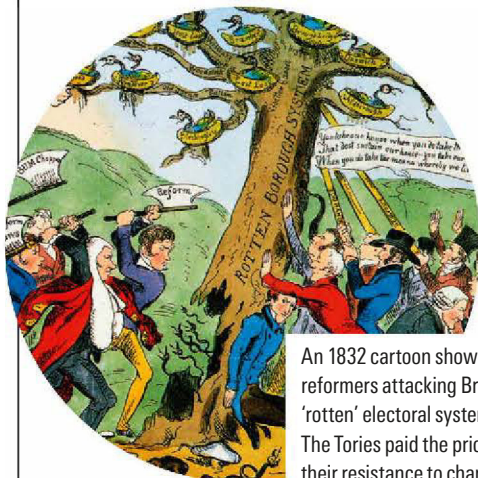
1832 Crushing defeat transforms the Tories

The British people have rarely come close to full-scale revolt, but in the early 1830s the country was in ferment. After years of neglect, the issue of parliamentary reform suddenly took centre stage, as popular anger against 'the Old Corruption' (a system of placemen and sinecures) came to a head. Agitation around the rights of Catholics mixed with economic distress and antislavery campaigning to add to this potent brew. That brew would reach boiling point as the 1832 general election approached – changing the Tory party and the country with it.

The 1832 election played out in the aftermath of a bitter battle to get parliamentary reform enshrined in law. The Whig politician Earl Grey won a general election in 1831, but struggled to pass his Reform Bill in the face of the hostility of Tory forces in the House of Lords. After the Duke of Wellington, a fierce opponent of change, failed to form a replacement Tory ministry, and following riots throughout the land, the bill passed in 1832.

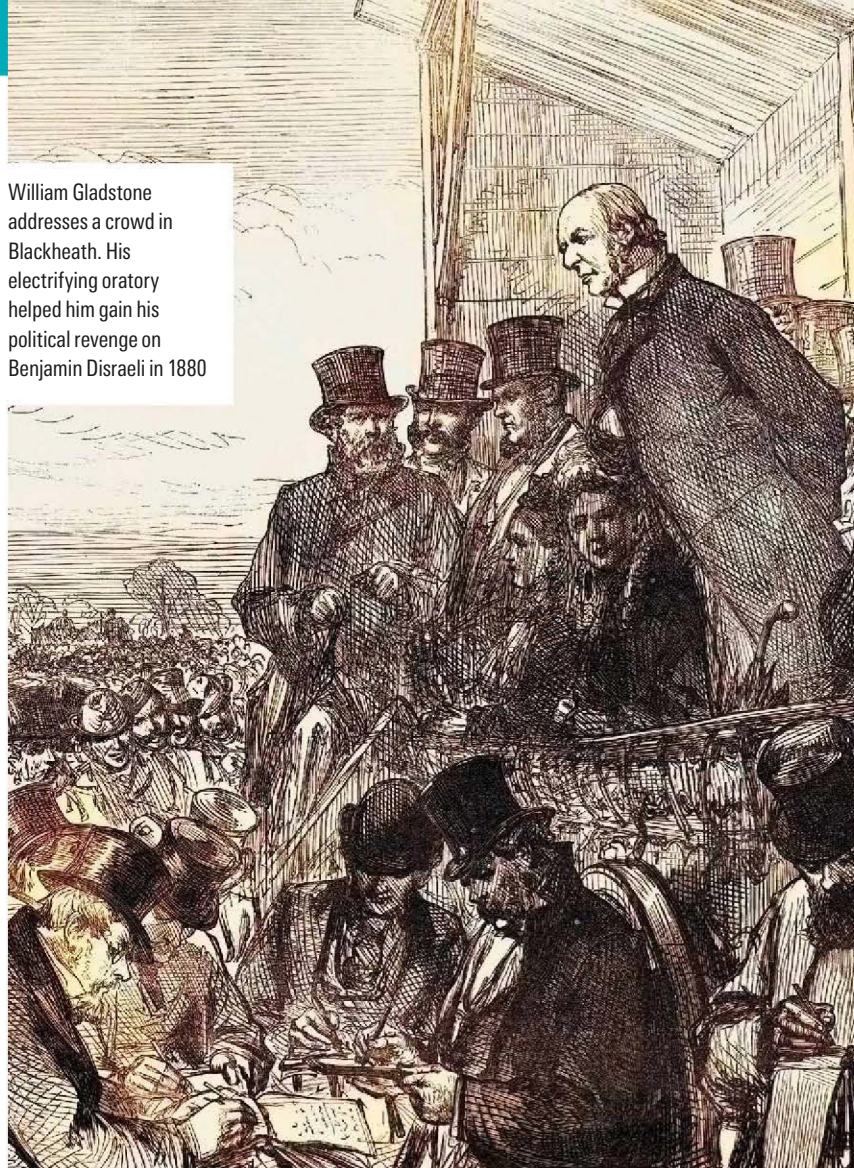
Grey's government capitalised by calling an election, with polling taking place from December 1832 to January 1833. The Whigs benefited from the newly expanded franchise, winning two-thirds of the seats.

Despite this crushing defeat, the Tories were soon back in power. But, under the leadership of Robert Peel, they increasingly called themselves 'Conservatives' instead of 'Tories', signifying a shift from an intransigent defence of privilege to an increased willingness to accept incremental change. The ancien régime had died and a new form of conservatism rose from its ashes.



An 1832 cartoon shows reformers attacking Britain's 'rotten' electoral system. The Tories paid the price for their resistance to change

William Gladstone addresses a crowd in Blackheath. His electrifying oratory helped him gain his political revenge on Benjamin Disraeli in 1880



1880 The clash of two Victorian titans

The epic quality of the 1880 election derived not merely from the scale of the Liberal victory, but from the fact that it pitted two political behemoths against one another. The surprise twist came when WE Gladstone won the premiership in spite of the fact that he wasn't even the leader of his own party.

The 'Grand Old Man', as Gladstone was known, had already been prime minister once. But after being bested by Disraeli's Conservatives in an 1874 landslide, he had gone into retirement

– or so he said. Two years later he returned to centre stage, working up popular outrage against the government's alleged indifference to the Ottoman massacre of Christians in Bulgaria. Then, in 1879–80, he made a series of speeches that electrified the nation, casting himself as the prosecuting attorney with Disraeli as the hapless defendant.

Gladstone took the traditional themes of peace, retrenchment and reform and added an anti-imperialist spin. Disraeli focused on the integrity of the empire, opposition to Irish home rule, and the need to maintain Britain's supremacy in Europe. But Gladstone's attacks on Disraeli carried the day, and the Liberals secured more than 50 per cent of the vote.

Queen Victoria much preferred that one of the party's official leaders, Lords Granville and Hartington, take the keys to No 10. But, Gladstone noted, these men "unitedly advised the Sovereign that it was most for the public advantage to send for me". It was an astonishing personal triumph.

// Gladstone won the premiership in spite of the fact that he wasn't even the leader of his own party //

1906 The Liberals smash Conservative dominance

Denominational religious instruction. 'Imperial Preference'. Indentured Chinese labour in South Africa. These questions from the run-up to the 1906 general election might seem like the obscure concerns of a forgotten era. But they were Edwardian hot-button issues.

The Conservative and Unionist party had dominated parliament for 20 years but – with Britons vexed by controversies surrounding education, trade policy, and the contested aftermath of the second Boer War – the ideological climate favoured Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's Liberals.

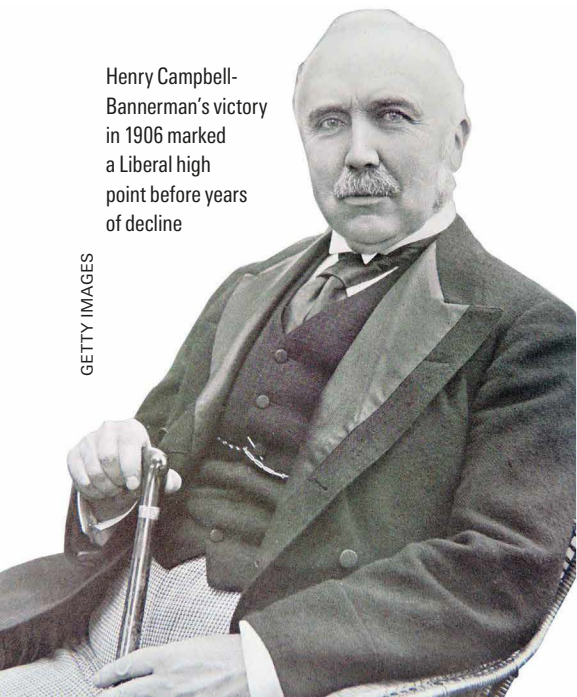
At the end of 1905, Conservative prime minister AJ Balfour resigned, hoping that the Liberals would lack the unity to form a new government and that he would be recalled.

The gamble failed. Campbell-Bannerman was indeed able to form a government and called an election for the new year. Having done a secret deal with the nascent Labour party to minimise electoral competition between them, the Liberals won a thumping 397 seats and ejected swathes of Conservative MPs, including Balfour himself.

But Campbell-Bannerman's triumph had its limits. The new government was battered by controversy over women's suffrage, Ireland, and the House of Lords. Historians still debate whether the First World War initiated the Liberal party's near-terminal decline, or merely accelerated it.

Henry Campbell-Bannerman's victory in 1906 marked a Liberal high point before years of decline

GETTY IMAGES



Labour supporters on the campaign trail in London, ahead of the 1923 general election. The party would go on to form a government for the very first time

1923 Labour's shock ascent to power

After the tumult of the First World War, many voters craved a return to normality, and by the end of 1922 this seemed to finally have arrived. With Stanley Baldwin occupying No 10 Downing Street the following year at the head of a large Conservative majority, calmer seas seemed to lie ahead. Then, in the autumn of 1923, Baldwin stunned the political world by calling a snap election.

Baldwin made his shock move because he believed the introduction of tariffs was necessary to deal with mass unemployment. His predecessor, Andrew Bonar Law, had promised not to implement tariffs without a further appeal to the electorate, and Baldwin said he felt "honour-bound to ask the people to release us from this pledge".

The move was an own goal. Lloyd George and HH Asquith, the leaders of separate Liberal factions, now reunited to combat the threat to free trade. The Labour party – which had existed for barely 20 years – also gained new wind.

When the votes were counted, the Conservatives were still the largest party in the Commons, but they had lost their majority. This made Asquith's Liberals the kingmakers, and they cleared the way for the ascent to power of the first Labour government, under Ramsay MacDonald, which took office early in 1924. That administration would be out of power by the end of year, but Britain's political landscape had shifted for good.

// Calmer seas seemed to lie ahead. Then Baldwin stunned the world by calling a snap election //

Unemployed men queue at a labour exchange in October 1931. That year's election was staged against the backdrop of a fearsome financial crisis



1931 The poll that cemented the two-party system

In political terms, the 1920s were a roller-coaster journey. The 1931 election was held in the shadow of dire economic conditions, and must have seemed like another twist in the dizzying ride. But the results themselves created a form of stability – one that gave birth to the enduring Labour-Conservative two-party system.

The second Labour government had taken office in 1929 shortly before the Wall Street crash. Two summers later, with the financial crisis threatening to get out of control, the cabinet split over the issue of cuts to unemployment benefit. Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald planned to resign. His colleagues were astonished when they learned that he had been persuaded to stay at No 10, leading a 'National Government' in coalition with Conservative and Liberal leaders.

Though MacDonald had genuinely intended this arrangement to be temporary, his new Tory allies quickly persuaded him to call a general election. He won a staggering, if Pyrrhic, victory.

It brought about humiliation for the Labour party, which won only about 50 seats. But, as the economist John Maynard Keynes pointed out, Labour was now the only significant body of opposition to the National Government, and it was therefore inevitable that it would be called upon to form a government one day. He was right, though he couldn't have known that this would only happen once a further world war had intervened.

// As John Maynard Keynes pointed out, Labour was now the only significant body of opposition to the National Government //



Ramsay MacDonald (bottom left) with members of the National Government on the steps of 10 Downing Street following the 1931 poll

1945 Churchill gets “the order of the boot”

The 1945 election is widely seen as one of the greatest upsets of all time. Winston Churchill was given “the Order of the Boot” (as he put it) in favour of Labour’s competent but uncharismatic Clement Attlee. The scale of the socialist victory astounded people, even though some pundits had predicted a minority Labour government or a Lib-Lab coalition. Yet there were many powerful

factors that had made a Conservative defeat almost inevitable.

Probably the least of these were Churchill’s own tactical mistakes. His suggestion that a Labour government would have to operate “some form of Gestapo” was an avoidable gaffe. But his decision to emphasise his war leadership skills was logical at a time when the conflict with Japan was still ongoing. Nevertheless, Labour’s positive message of social and economic reform evoked the spirit of hope at a time when few people wanted to buckle down for more blood, toil and sweat.

Attlee proved an effective campaigner, assisted by big hitters such as Ernest Bevin and Herbert Morrison. We don’t know how many voters actually read Labour’s punchy but detailed manifesto, but its title, *Let Us Face the Future*, conveyed exactly the message that so many of them wanted to hear.

// Churchill’s suggestion that a Labour government would have to operate ‘some form of Gestapo’ was an own goal //



GETTY IMAGES

A poster calls upon residents of Finsbury to vote for John Platts-Mills in the 1945 general election. Platts-Mills was one of 393 Labour candidates to win their seats in what was a historic landslide



Margaret Thatcher waves to well-wishers following a victory that signalled a sea-change in politics

1979 Thatcher rides the tide of history

Standing on the steps of 10 Downing Street on 4 May 1979, the freshly elected Margaret Thatcher quoted St Francis of Assisi: “Where there is discord, may we bring harmony.” Coming from a famously combative figure, this was a surprising choice of words. But many voters longed for normality after the ‘Winter of Discontent’ that had rocked the previous government. Thatcher wanted to make industrial unrest a thing of the past by re-engineering the economy on free-market lines.

She had needed a lot of luck and grit to get to that point. Many Conservative MPs were still loyal to Edward Heath, the relatively moderate leader she had pushed out in 1975. In fact, Thatcher was personally less popular than the Labour prime minister, ‘Sunny Jim’ Callaghan. But when the moment came, the tide of history was on her side.

As Callaghan remarked to an aide towards the end of the campaign: “There are times, perhaps once every 30 years, when there is a sea-change in politics. It then does not matter what you say or what you do. [...] I suspect there is now such a sea-change – and it is for Mrs Thatcher.” **H**

Richard Toye is professor of history at the University of Exeter

BEHIND THE NEWS

Running the numbers

Since 1945, opinion polls have become a significant part of British elections – despite the occasional notable misstep

BY SARAH RICHARDSON

In May 1970, the Labour party's master political tactician Harold Wilson called for a general election primarily on the basis of opinion polling. Those polls had moved from predicting a Conservative victory to forecasting a Labour triumph by a margin of more than 7 per cent. On 12 June, with just six days to go before polling, the National Opinion Polls company gave Labour a whopping 12.4 per cent lead. Wilson, who had occupied 10 Downing Street since 1964, had cause to be cautiously optimistic.

And why not? Since their introduction to British elections in 1945, opinion polls had proven to be remarkably accurate in predicting the outcomes of general elections. The trouble is, in 1970 these polls were wrong. Edward Heath's Conservative party were returned to power with an overall majority of 30 seats. They had gained an impressive 77 seats on the back of a 4.7 per cent swing.

Once the dust settled on the election, *The Times* newspaper (conveniently forgetting it had commissioned its own polls from Marplan, which had indicated a huge Labour victory), published an excoriating

attack on polling. "Long after the arguments are forgotten, the general election of June 18, 1970 will be remembered as the occasion when the people of the United Kingdom hurled the findings of the opinion polls back into the faces of the pollsters and at the voting booths proved them wrong – most of them badly wrong," the paper intoned. "Mr Heath had to fight the whole period of the campaign with the polls reporting the balance of opinion persistently against him and his party. To his credit, Mr Heath refused to be bamboozled."

What had gone wrong? There is no doubt that the Tories gained significantly in the final stages of the campaign. Heath's attacks on Wilson's economic record struck a chord with many voters when the monthly trade figures were published on 15 June, showing that the balance of payments had moved back into deficit by £31m. The election saw 18-year-olds vote for the first time (the age threshold had been lowered from 21 to 18 in 1969) and the turnout was also lower than predicted – though still a healthy (by today's standards) 72 per cent. It appears that a combination of abstentions, new voters and

late-switching voters all played in the Conservatives' favour.

Inevitably, when there were discrepancies between polls and the actual results, there were calls for them to be banned. Rodney Graham Page, the Conservative MP for Crosby, remarked: "The opinion polls are up the pole. Do not let them turn you into a political hypochondriac, continually taking your political temperature. The pollster's thermometer is haywire anyway."

Page argued that the opinion polls used a sort of witches' brew called a socio-economic classification that puts each one of us into a certain group according to our occupation. Each group was a percentage of the population and so one person's opinion was multiplied by the number in their group.

Page wasn't alone in levelling allegations of manipulation by dubious statistical methods. Distinguished Cambridge economist Michael Ward supported a ban on pre-election opinion polls, arguing that "the polls affect the bets and the bets prejudice the actual votes. When money is involved, everyone climbs on the bandwagon." It was left to the Gallup organisation, the company



Exit poll Harold Wilson addresses Manchester workers during his 1970 election campaign. Pollsters suggested a major win – but the public voted him out

that brought polling to Britain, to make the case for the defence. “Why do people want opinion polling banned? Does democracy work better in the dark? Is it better to have polls driven underground, undertaken by the rich for their private benefit rather than have them made and published in the open?”

Gallup was right, of course. As long as there have been elections in Britain, there has been a desire by candidates to predict (and to influence) the result. Before the opinion polls, there was the private canvass, and it is true that the wealthier the candidate, the more extensive the surveying of potential electors. Canvassing rolls survive from the 17th century, and party agents would draw up detailed lists of potential voters and their likely intentions.

Of course, in early elections it was sometimes possible for a candidate to canvass every voter personally. In 1710, Lord Roxburghe, anxious about the prospect of his candidate, William Bennet, arranged for his mother to tour the constituency of Roxburghshire (in southern Scotland) to speak to every voter and cajole them for support. This task was not too daunting

for Countess Roxburghe, as there were only around 50 voters in total. Unfortunately, Roxburghe’s fears for Bennet were correct and her efforts proved unsuccessful.

Notoriously, Georgiana, the Duchess of Devonshire, went out canvassing for Charles James Fox in the Westminster election of 1784 and exchanged kisses for votes. Canvassing was very expensive in the period before election costs were controlled, with one candidate spending £1,400 in Chester in 1695. This merely stresses the fact that wealth, not popularity, could swing an election.

Before the 1872 Ballot Act, definitive ‘exit polls’, lists of voters and how they voted, were published widely by parties and newspapers. An Act of 1696 had required returning officers to deliver copies of the poll centrally to parliament but these were quickly copied locally and often candidates would produce their own versions.

The publication of voters’ names and how they voted enabled direct pressure to be applied both before and after elections. In the 1837 Huddersfield election, the popular

Tory radical Richard Oastler used women to deliver an address to shopkeepers threatening to withdraw their custom and that of their neighbours if they did not support him. After an election, losing candidates and their patrons could be brutal. Elizabeth Sophia Lawrence of Fountains Abbey summarily evicted tenants who voted against her candidates in the Ripon election of 1832, “even to the poor widow aged 80!”

It was not until 1945 that an election in Britain was able to draw on public opinion polls. The British Gallup Polls had been introduced in 1937 and polling had gone on throughout the war. From 1942, the results of these polls appeared in the *News Chronicle*, and they consistently predicted a Labour victory. However, very little attention was paid to them, even by the political staff of the *Chronicle*. Few expected a Labour victory – and that includes key Labour politicians such as Herbert Morrison and Hugh Dalton, the latter of whom suggested there would either be a small Tory majority or a hung parliament. Winston Churchill informed the king that he expected a majority of between 30 and 80 seats.



Surprise result Newspaper front pages from the day of the Brexit result, 24 June 2016. Many opinion polls wrongly predicted the vote's outcome

/// The desire to monitor voters' intentions has existed as long as there have been contests for parliamentary seats ///

The size of the Labour majority therefore came as a huge shock once the result was known in late July, three weeks after polling. The final Gallup prediction was accurate to a margin of 1 per cent.

Gallup's success led to a proliferation of companies, some financed by the media, entering the market. Many, such as Mori, Harris and YouGov have become household names. And, in spite of the experience of 1970, the polls generally have a good record of predicting the 'vote share' of the main political parties, rarely exceeding a 2 per cent error rate. It is more difficult to estimate results because the 'first past the post' system means that a very few voters can materially affect the number of seats gained by each party regardless of vote share.

However, in spite of their reputation for accuracy, the polls have occasionally

got things badly wrong both in the UK and the US. In the Brexit referendum in 2016, the vast majority of polls consistently showed a majority for 'remain', with the poll of all polls predicting a 52% / 48% split in favour of staying in the EU. When the results came in, there was widespread shock that the predictions were reversed in favour of 'leave'. Polls for the 2020 US presidential election were the least accurate in 40 years of surveying voters. Most over-estimated Joe Biden's support by around 4 per cent. This has partly been attributed to Donald Trump's vituperative attack on polls which showed him in second place, making Republican voters less confident in opinion polling and less likely to participate in the surveys.

The techniques of opinion polling, far from being 'a witches' brew', have always been subject to continual and careful re-calibration. Most published polling continues to be based on quantitative surveys of selected voters regulated for characteristics such as age, sex, race, class and occupation, as well as geographical location. The first polls were conducted by postal surveys, but these were quickly replaced by face-to-face interviews and these remained the standard approach until the late 1990s when the telephone survey took over. Social media and internet polling are popular today, but polling companies remain convinced that direct

interviews with selected voters remain the most reliable indicator of voting intention.

Opinion polls can and do influence voter behaviour. This is most obviously seen in turnout. In a 'safe' seat, when polls predict a national win for a party, supporters of smaller opposition parties appear less likely to go to the polls. Sometimes, believing their cause is lost, they will vote tactically. As there is a link between poll predictions and voter behaviour, there are important guidelines on the responsible reporting of polls, and the publication of opinion polls on election day is strongly discouraged. Under the terms of the 1983 Representation of the People Act, it is also a criminal offence to report information gained from an exit poll until after polls have closed, for fear of unfairly skewing voting decisions.

Opinion polls look set to remain a significant element of Britain's electoral landscape. The desire to track and monitor voters' intentions has been a perennial part of electioneering and has existed as long as there have been contests for parliamentary seats. Today, with the surfeit of sophisticated methods to measure and predict voting behaviour, it seems unlikely that the country will awake to a shock result like that of 1970. But then again, who really knows? **H**

Sarah Richardson is professor of modern British history at the University of Glasgow



MICHAEL WOOD ON...
THE GLOBAL IMPORTANCE OF INDIAN DEMOCRACY

// Nehru's idea of a secular India has begun to be seriously questioned //

.....
Michael Wood is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. He has presented numerous BBC series. His latest book is *In the Footsteps of Du Fu* (Simon & Schuster, 2023). You'll find him on X at *MichaelWoodMV*

B B C

AFTER THE INDIAN ELECTIONS OF 2004, Sonia Gandhi was, technically, prime minister in waiting. She was the widow of Rajiv Gandhi, who had – like his mother, Indira Gandhi, and grandfather, Jawaharlal Nehru – led the Indian National Congress party and served as prime minister. But Sonia's succession was queried, as she wasn't born in India. So we witnessed the extraordinary sight of an Italian Catholic woman giving way to a Sikh, Manmohan Singh, who swore the oath to a Muslim president – in a majority Hindu nation. Where else on Earth, one wonders, could that have happened?

That story flashed into my mind last month as I watched the Indian elections unfold over six weeks when more than 600 million people went to the polls. India is, famously, the world's largest democracy, but recently liberal papers have carried gloomy prophecies about the growing dominance of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under Narendra Modi. Friends in Delhi whispered of attacks on the free press. "No longer can you call us a democracy," said one, glumly. "India is on the way to becoming an elective autocracy."

The result in June, then, came as a big shock. The BJP lost dozens of seats and failed to win an overall majority, let alone the landslide it had confidently predicted. Indian democracy was shown to be more robust than anyone had been prepared to bet. During the Emergency of the mid-1970s, Indira Gandhi had suspended democracy – and

was thrown out at the next election.

Today, 50 years later, the

secular state created by Nehru in 1947 has shown that it still has life in it. And with populism and dictatorships on the rise everywhere, what India does really matters.

The modern narrative of India's past was shaped during the freedom movement by Congress, led by Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi – British-educated, English-speaking lawyers who emphasised secularism and Hindu-Muslim unity. But independence in 1947 saw the catastrophic partition of India on religious grounds. From that moment, the past became increasingly dangerous – as it so often is. In his great book *The Discovery of India* (1946), Nehru held up as heroes enlightened leaders such as the Mughal emperor Akbar, whose idea of the country was pluralist and non-sectarian. But other histories were already clamouring for attention.

In the 19th century, the nascent Hindu nationalist movement saw the British occupation as the catalyst for the end of Muslim domination in India and the coming of Hindu rule after the British had gone – a return to an imagined golden age before the arrival of Islam. The partition of 1947 problematised Islam within India for the first time: if partition had been undertaken on religious grounds, and if the new state of Pakistan was expressly an Islamic state, then where did that leave India? Was it, as Nehru asserted, a secular state? Or should it be a Hindu country?

For Hindu nationalists, the answer was obvious – and from that moment, the pressure began to grow inexorably in Indian politics. Over the past 30 years or so, the idea of a secular India has begun to be seriously questioned.

Mr Modi's BJP has been in power since 2014. Founded in 1980, it grew out of existing Hindu organisations including the hard-line Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), founded in 1925. A member of RSS, Mr Modi is all-powerful in northern India. Before this summer's election, he was confident of winning an overwhelming majority in parliament – which some said could enable him to rewrite the constitution, making India a Hindu state. In a growing atmosphere of polarisation, the implications for the 200 million Muslim minority were potentially grave. The results, then, proved an extraordinary turnaround.

One of the world's oldest living civilisations, with the world's biggest population, India is recovering now from British colonial rule. One of the two biggest world economies in 1600, by the 20th century it had sunk to just 3 per cent of world GDP. Incredibly dynamic and youthful – nearly 50 per cent of its population is under 25 – India now seems set on a path of unstoppable growth and change. There's a strong continuity with the traditional Indian ways of doing things – but also, it seems, a continuing commitment to an open society. The election this summer, then, could prove very important for Indian democracy – and, indeed, for democracy everywhere. ■





HIDDEN HISTORIES

KAVITA PURI on personal responses to the Bengal famine of 1943

// It's hard not to feel emotional about the vast loss of life //

WHEN YOU PUT AN OVERLOOKED HISTORY – especially one within living memory – into the public space, it unlocks so many other stories. You are never sure, though, exactly what those may be.

Earlier this year, BBC Sounds launched my series *Three Million*, exploring the Bengal famine of 1943. Around three million Indians – British subjects – died in the famine, yet it's not well known in Britain.

After hearing the podcast, many people shared personal stories. One friend told me that his father, a British soldier stationed in India during the war, had witnessed the famine and, shocked by what he had seen, blamed British politicians at the time. Despite being friends for 20 years, I had no idea that my friend's father had been in India during the war or been a witness to the famine, nor that he had been asked to smuggle a trunk-load of pro-independence books on his troopship.

That was only one of many insights shared with me, and not only by descendants of British and American soldiers stationed in India. Children of Quaker missionaries and relief workers also got in touch, having been reminded of something their relatives had said that began to make sense, and who now wanted to find out more.

People of Bengali heritage got in contact, too. Some recounted stories passed down to them; others knew little about the catastrophe. One woman wrote to tell me that, while growing up in Surrey, she had been scolded to "*khe nao, khe nao... bhaat phelte neye*" – never leave a grain of rice on your plate. "Now we know why," she said.

I certainly hadn't imagined that I would meet the granddaughter of one of the most senior colonial figures in the region during the famine, Sir John Herbert. I'd read a lot about him, unsurprisingly: he was governor of Bengal from 1939 to 1943, in the run-up to and at the height of the famine. After hearing the series, Susannah Herbert wanted to find out more about her grandfather and his role in the disaster. So we made a new episode of *Three Million* – which is available to listen to via BBC Sounds now – in which I follow her progress as she wades through her family archives in Wales, reads everything she can on the famine, and speaks to experts.

The subject elicits complex emotions in her. She never knew her grandfather: he died in December 1943, aged just 47. But understanding his role, and what Indian and colonial politicians thought of him, as well as coming to terms with the enormity of the famine, is a huge thing for her to get her head around. Initially, she says, she felt shame at what happened. But why should Susannah feel this shame, so many decades on?

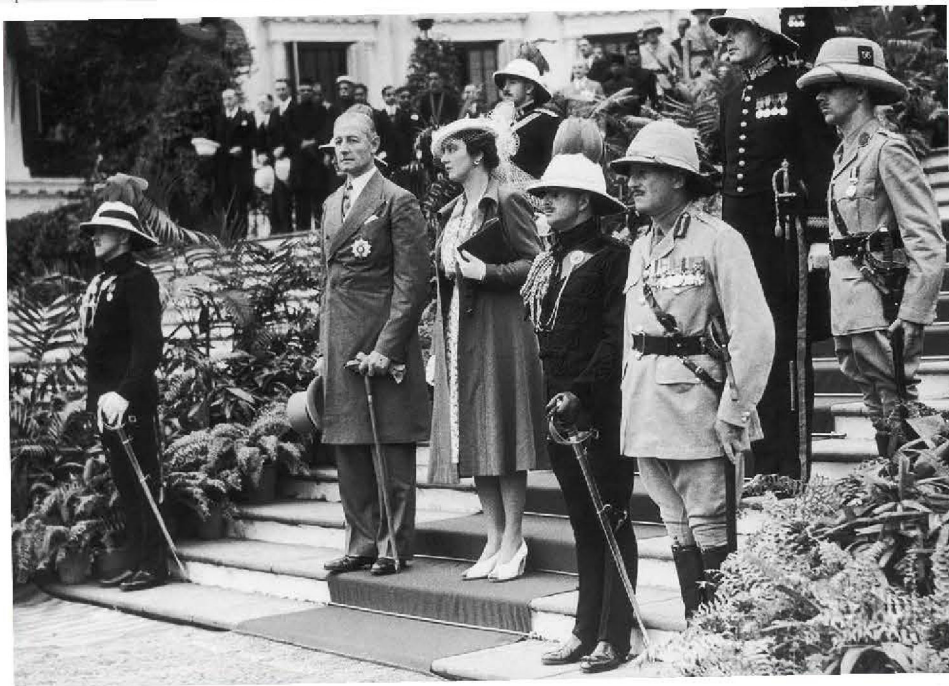
Susannah's quest to understand her family past, and to reconcile with this difficult history, is something we as a country are also navigating collectively. What do we do with this knowledge years on, when the people who made decisions are long gone? It's hard not to feel emotional about the vast loss of life.

Academic discourse has often focused on culpability – an important question, and one that has led to an ongoing contentious debate. But this history can also be approached in a different way – one that's centred on individual experiences. Responses to the series helped me realise that there are connections to that history in many British and Bengali families across the UK. The varied conversations that have been sparked, and the investigations into relatives' pasts that individuals across the country are undertaking, are being conducted with seriousness and sensitivity.

Maybe, in time, we will be able to tackle the harder questions in a way that is not so fractious. I don't think we should feel shame, but it is important to acknowledge the past – even such a difficult one. **H**

Kavita Puri

is a journalist and broadcaster for BBC Radio 4. Her latest BBC Sounds podcast, *Three Million*, charts the 1943 Bengal Famine. She is also author of *Partition Voices: Untold British Stories* (Bloomsbury, 2019)



Sir John Herbert (centre, with his wife, Lady Mary) arrives to take up the post of governor of Bengal in 1939. His role in the subsequent famine is now being explored by his granddaughter

Her mother is a
high Priestess of Dionysus.

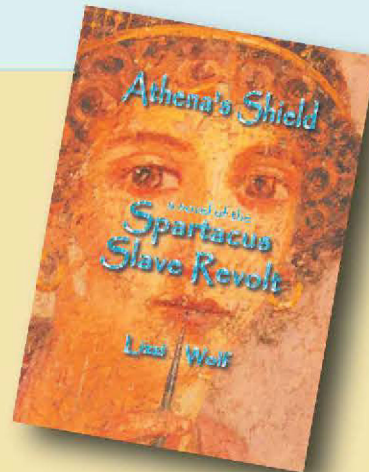
Her father is the greatest gladiator
in all of Rome. He is also a slave.



Athena's Shield

A Novel of the Spartacus Slave Revolt
by Lizzi Wolf

Available on Amazon



THE
WALLACE
COLLECTION



Ranjit Singh

SIKH • WARRIOR • KING

10 April - 20 October 2024

BOOK
NOW

wallacecollection.org

— Bond Street

MEMBERS GO FREE



The minesweeper HMS *Salamander*, to which reader Paul Thomas has a family connection

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Alternative education

Michael Wood cites Shakespeare's "lack of education" (July) as a reason some people give for doubting that he wrote his plays – but many people achieve great things through self-education, which often does not show up in their academic record. Shakespeare undoubtedly falls into this category, although he also began with a good grammar-school grounding.

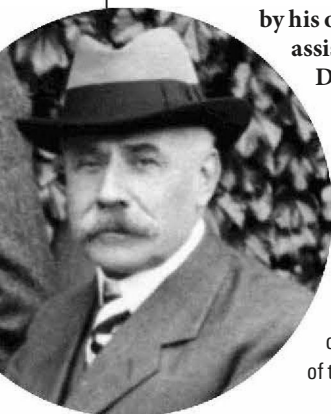
Other examples include John Clare, the 19th-century 'peasant' poet who received only the most basic of village educations. But he became obsessed with literature and poetry, fuelling his appetite with frequent trips to town libraries and gathering what he needed to fulfil his talents. He went on to become one of the major poets of his time.

Edward Elgar, meanwhile, received a decent school education but never studied music at college. His father owned a music shop, and Elgar was able to take advantage of the books and instruments at his disposal to educate himself – which he did in full measure. Greatness, a knighthood and an Order of Merit were to follow, after some years of struggle and poverty.

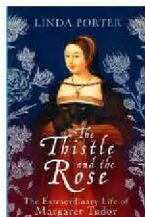
Several scientists in past centuries could also be cited. Michael Faraday served a long apprenticeship as a bookbinder, but the science books that passed through his hands ignited an interest that led to him becoming one of the 19th century's most eminent scientists almost entirely

by his own efforts (he was an assistant to Sir Humphry Davy, but he didn't always encourage him).

Tim McCormick,
Evesham



Edward Elgar pictured in 1922. Reader Tim McCormick cites the composer as an example of the value of self-tuition



We reward the Letter of the Month writer with a copy of a new book. This issue, that's *The Thistle and the Rose: The Extraordinary Life of Margaret Tudor* by Linda Porter. Read our review on page 74

All's well that ends well

Many years ago, a distinguished Ivy League professor told me he didn't believe that a country boy from Stratford could have written Shakespeare's plays. I told him that a Tudor grammar-school education would have given the playwright all the knowledge he needed to write about Othello, Julius Caesar and so on – but that only a countryman would have known, as is mentioned in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, that thyme grows on a bank and that violets nod. The professor saw the point and changed his mind immediately.

Stephen Halliday, Cambridge

A dangerous path

Reading Nick Hewitt's article *Normandy's Forgotten Heroes* (June) brought to mind something mentioned only in passing – the role of minesweeping flotillas (MSFs). My dad's uncle was a stoker on HMS *Salamander*, the minesweeper that was part of the 1st MSF which swept the channel to Sword beach.

Not only did the MSFs sweep the channels to the beaches, they continued operations in the Channel for several months after D-Day. Their main function was to create mine-free locations used for the anchorage of supply ships and the battleships involved in the bombardment of German coastal defences. Indeed, it was in making such a mine-free area that the 1st MSF was subject of one of the war's deadliest friendly-fire incidents.

On 27 August, while sweeping an area just north of Le Havre, the 1st MSF came under attack from two RAF squadrons believing the flotilla to be a group of enemy ships. As a result, two minesweepers, HMS *Hussar* and HMS *Britomart*, were sunk, and *Salamander* was badly damaged but fortunately towed to safety. In all, 117 British sailors lost their lives.

Later investigations revealed that the leader of one of the RAF squadrons had asked four times for confirmation that the ships were not Allied vessels. Unfortunately, the Flag Officer, British Assault Area had not been informed of the minesweeping flotilla's orders and was unable to confirm the ships' identity.

Paul Thomas, Bury St Edmunds

Dramatic licence

My take on whether historical drama should reflect modern sensibilities (*The Conversation*, July) is that, if a drama is based on historical figures, it should also be based on established facts. If the drama presents a sweeping view of the times, then artistic licence is fine. Dramas like *The Crown* are more difficult: because there is a huge PR machine – consisting of



the establishment, the press and the royal household – between the royal family and the public, determining the facts is much trickier. One could argue that, since no action has been taken in the law courts, its depiction is reasonably accurate – but who knows?

Peter Goundry, Chiang Mai

Lost queens

Is it my imagination, or is there an awful lot of coverage of the Tudors generally and Anne Boleyn specifically? Were the Tudors the *only* ruling house in England and Scotland? Did none of the many kings

**SAVE WHEN YOU
SUBSCRIBE TODAY**

➤ Page 56



A 16th-century depiction of Matilda II, Countess of Boulogne – one of the figures that reader Rosemary Norton argues deserves more attention

have queens – either as consorts or rulers? Don't historians write about other periods?

On a similar note: instead of Boudicca, why not focus on Æthelflæd? At least she won her battles! What about the Matildas of Flanders, Scotland or Boulogne, Eleanor of Castile, or the many English ladies who became queens of Scottish kings? There is a whole wealth of ruling houses and queens before and after 1066. Plumb the depths of historical figures not only from these shores but from around the globe – for the sake of variety, if nothing else!

Rosemary Norton, Leighton Buzzard

International sport

Stephen Palmer wondered about Wembley Arena's name originally being the Empire Pool (*Letters*, June). The building was erected for the 1934 British Empire and Commonwealth Games to stage the swimming events. It was then used for the 1938 European Swimming Championships and the 1948 Olympics – during the latter not only for the aquatic competitions but also the boxing tournament, with a platform for the fighters erected in the middle of the pool with a bridge to the side. The pool was then covered over and has not been used for swimming since.

I reported on a range of sports events held at the venue, from professional boxing, gymnastics and athletics in the 1960s to a netball international in 2017. With 12,500 permanent seats, it's London's second largest indoor arena after The O2.

John Goodbody, sports correspondent for *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* 1986–2019, London



EDITORIAL

Editor Rob Attar robertattar@historyextra.com
Deputy editor Matt Elton mattelton@historyextra.com
Senior production editor Spencer Mizen
Production editor Jon Bauckham
Staff writer Danny Bird
Picture editor Samantha Nott samnott@historyextra.com
Art director Susanne Frank
Art editor Sheu Ho
Senior deputy art editor Rachel Dickens
Podcast editor Ellie Cawthorne
Podcast content producer Emily Briffett
Content director Dr David Musgrove
Strategic projects editor Charlotte Hodgman
Digital editor Elinor Evans
Deputy digital editor Kev Lochun
Premium content editor Rachel Dinning
Digital content producers Lauren Good, James Osborne

Fact-checkers: Dr Robert Blackmore, John Evans, Amy Louise Smith, Isabel King, Lucy Jane Santos, Felicity Day, Gordon O'Sullivan, Daniel Watkins
Picture consultant: Everett Sharp
Thanks to Paul Bloomfield, Sarah Lambert, Rosemary Smith and Russell Deeks

ADVERTISING & MARKETING

Senior brand sales executive
 Sam Evanson 0117 300 8544
Brand sales executive
 Victoria Allan 0117 300 8212
Victoria.Allan@immediate.co.uk
Group direct marketing manager
 Laurence Robertson 00353 5787 57444
Direct marketing executive Aisha Babb
US representative Kate Buckley
buckley@buckleypell.com

PRESS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

PR manager Natasha Lee
Natasha.Lee@immediate.co.uk

LICENSING & SYNDICATION

Director of International, Licensing & Top Gear Magazine, UK Tim Hudson
Head of Partners, Brand Management & Ethical Compliance Molly Hope-Seton
Head of Licensing Tom Shaw
Head of Syndication Richard Bentley

HISTORYEXTRA PODCAST

Head of podcasts Ben Youatt
Podcast producer Jack Bateman
Podcast deputy Brittany Collie
Podcast coordinator Emily Thorne
Podcast assistants Daniel Kramer-Arden, Samuel Leale-Green and Lewis Dobbs

PRODUCTION

Production director Koli Pickersgill
Production manager Lee Spencer
Senior repro technician Darren McCubbin
Senior ad services co-ordinator Cherine Robins

IMMEDIATE MEDIA COMPANY

Commercial director Jemima Dixon
Group managing director Alex White
CEO Sean Cornwell
CFO & COO Dan Constanda
Chairman Tom Bureau

BBC HISTORY MAGAZINE

Founding editor Greg Neale

BBC STUDIOS, UK PUBLISHING

Chair, Editorial Review Boards Nicholas Brett
Managing Director, Consumer Products and Licensing Stephen Davies
Global Director, Magazines Mandy Thwaites
Compliance manager Cameron McEwan
uk.publishing@bbc.com

IMMEDIATE

Vol 25 No 8 – August 2024
 BBC History Magazine is published by Immediate Media Company London Limited under licence from BBC Studios who help fund new BBC programmes.

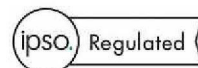
BBC History Magazine was established to publish authoritative history, written by leading experts, in an accessible and attractive format. We seek to maintain the high journalistic standards traditionally associated with the BBC.

© Immediate Media Company London Limited, 2024 – ISSN: 1469 8552

Not for resale. All rights reserved. Unauthorised reproduction in whole or part is prohibited without written permission. Every effort has been made to secure permission for copyright material. In the event of any material being used inadvertently, or where it proved impossible to trace the copyright owner, acknowledgement will be made in a future issue. MSS, photographs and artwork are accepted on the basis that BBC History Magazine and its agents do not accept liability for loss or damage to same. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the publisher.

We abide by IPSO's rules and regulations. To give feedback about our magazines, please visit immediate.co.uk, email editorialcomplaints@immediate.co.uk or write to Katherine Conlon, Immediate Media Co., Vineyard House, 44 Brook Green, London W6 7BT.

Immediate Media Company is working to ensure that all of its paper is sourced from well-managed forests. This magazine can be recycled, for use in newspapers and packaging. Please remove any gifts, samples or wrapping and dispose of it at your local collection point.



WRITE TO US

We welcome your letters, while reserving the right to edit them. We may publish your letters on our website. Please include a daytime phone number and, if emailing, a postal address (not for publication). Letters should be no longer than 250 words.
Email: letters@historyextra.com **Post:** BBC History Magazine, Immediate Media, Eagle House, Bristol, BS1 4ST

The opinions expressed by our commentators are their own and may not represent the views of BBC History Magazine or Immediate Media Company

WARZONE

A crusader army led by French king Louis IX clashes with Ayyubid forces at Mansurah in 1250. Two centuries of warfare across the Middle East "drew a torrent of often dangerous young men into the region", writes Steve Tibble

The crusades sparked centuries of violence and chaos – and not just on the battlefield. **Steve Tibble** describes the surge in criminality – from petty theft to cold-blooded murder – that accompanied the warring armies to the Holy Land

Dark knights

GETTY IMAGES





A QUESTION OF FAITH

Christians battle Muslims in a 13th-century illustration. Though the crusades are usually painted as wars between faiths, many acts of violence were unrelated to religion

Modern statesmen live in the expectation of a metaphorical knife in the back from their political enemies. The situation in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem was similar, but the knives were far less metaphorical.

Miles of Plancy, a powerful nobleman, was not popular with his peers. He could be rude. He could be arrogant. But his main failing, in the eyes of his fellow nobles at least, was that he was far too successful.

Miles stepped in to become regent in July 1174, after King Amalric – who had ruled the crusader state since 1163 – died unexpectedly. Miles's elevation to one of the most important roles in all of the Christian Levant was unwelcome to the older families. He was warned that conspiracies were in train. But instead of taking a more conciliatory stance, Miles appears to have made light of it.

Events moved far more quickly than Miles expected, however. One day, “while staying at the city of Acre, he was stabbed on the public street just at dusk”, so William of Tyre, the famous chronicler of the crusades, tells us, and “died after suffering ignominious and shameful treatment”.

The murder was ruthlessly carried out and the assassin was probably on a ship back to France or Italy within the hour. The brutal world of crusader politics moved on without skipping a beat.

Bishop William of Acre appears to

have made far fewer enemies than the ambitious Miles of Plancy. But that didn't prevent him from meeting a similarly grisly fate two years earlier, in 1172.

After hearing blood-curdling cries, William's servants had broken into his room in the Byzantine city of Adrianople to discover his butchered body. An assailant had slashed at the highly respected bishop while he rested and recovered from his long, exhausting travels.

It was an astonishing episode. Although it occurred during the crusades, William was a member of a peaceful mission travelling through the Byzantine empire, deep inside Christian territory. His was a diplomatic corps of unassuming mediators – priests going about their business. Violence was the last thing they expected. Even more astonishingly, as we'll see, the killing had been perpetrated by one of their own.

Yet perhaps William's party should have been accustomed to such bloodshed, because they were living in a region swamped by wave after wave of often violent crime.

Existential threat

By the time of the attack on Bishop William, the long, episodic fight for the Holy Land that followed the launch of the First Crusade in 1096 had been raging intermittently for three-quarters of a century, and was reaching a bloody crescendo. A Kurdish general named Salah al-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub – better known to the crusaders and to posterity as Saladin – had taken Egypt, in the process gaining control of great wealth and large numbers of mercenaries. He now posed an existential threat to the crusader states established across the region.

In 1171, these Christian states launched a flurry of diplomatic activity, seeking allies who could help them

The real problem of the crusades was not religion – it was dislocated, disinhibited young men, arriving in large numbers

face this new danger. Bishop William of Acre and his small team of negotiators and household servants were part of this charm offensive. By June 1172, they had been travelling on the punishing roads of the eastern Mediterranean and the Byzantine empire for more than a year.

The gruelling mission had taken a heavy toll on everyone in the party, but had proved particularly hard on one young man, a valued member of Bishop William's household named Brother Robert. He seems to have had a breakdown of some kind, brought on by stress and the seemingly unending rigours of their journey.

So the group stopped at the city of Adrianople (now Edirne, far north-west Turkey) on their way back to the Byzantine court in Constantinople. There they rested, hoping that Brother Robert would recover enough to be able to continue the journey. Sadly, the opposite happened. It seems that Robert experienced a psychotic episode, sparking a bout of inexplicable violence. While his companions were asleep, wrote William of Tyre, "suddenly a madness came upon him; he seized his sword and stabbed the sleeping bishop, inflicting fatal wounds". The attack was over within seconds, leaving the bishop fatally wounded.

The dying man didn't, though, call for revenge to be meted out to the young priest. Instead, he insisted that Robert be treated gently. The assailant was clearly not responsible for his actions, William recognised.

Yet that defence wouldn't stand up to scrutiny for the majority of crimes committed across the region – and there were many. We think of the crusades as a succession of campaigns in which violent attacks on Muslim-held targets in the Middle East were met with violent resistance – a bloody clash of ideologies and faiths. But the real problem of the crusades was not religion – it was young men. Dislocated, disinhibited young men, arriving in disturbingly large numbers. This tsunami of youth was the propellant that fuelled two centuries of warfare and shocking levels of criminality.

Co-opting criminals

The myriad of anecdotes that I discovered while researching my new book, *Crusader Criminals*, suggests that a massive, and largely untold, increase in crime took place at this time. And this crusader crimewave was shaped by three principal – and surprisingly modern – factors: migration, male entitlement and climate change.

In the decades before the launch of the First Crusade, the climate in the eastern Mediterranean and western Eurasian steppes became unstable, frequently causing unusually cold and unusually hot spells, typically accompanied by famines or droughts. The nomadic Turkic tribes of the western Eurasian steppes were hit particularly hard. Unlike sedentary societies, they maintained limited food reserves, so their only response to a sudden famine was to move away.

This was the first major wave of migration to consider in this story: the movement of a loose confederation of Seljuk Turkic warbands into the



ROGUE RECRUITMENT

A 15th-century manuscript shows King Louis IX of France embarking for the Seventh Crusade in 1248.

According to accounts by the chronicler Jean de Joinville, recruits among the king's troops included men known to be violent criminals

Middle East in the second half of the 11th century. These nomadic tribes were recent converts to Sunni Islam, but most had little interest in theology. They attacked settled communities, fighting Christians and Muslims alike, and took what they wanted. By the 1080s, these steppe warlords had taken much of Byzantine Anatolia and Palestine, plus most of the Arab Syrian city-states.

The Byzantine empire called on the Christian powers of western Europe for help, sparking the expedition that became known as the First Crusade – the second pivotal migration. Following a succession of military victories, including the capture of Jerusalem in 1099, some of the crusaders established colonies in the region – polities that later became known as the 'crusader states'.

That was, of course, far from the end of the conflict. Two centuries of war followed, fuelling an ongoing recruitment drive for young mercenaries and other long-distance recruits to bolster both Christian and Muslim forces, drawing a torrent of often dangerous men into the region. The incidence of violence soared – and remained spectacularly high, even by the standards of a region noted for its lawlessness, resulting in widespread chaos and social upheaval.

That's unsurprising when you look at the kind of men being recruited. Consider this episode of 1248, during the French king Louis IX's

preparations for what became known as the Seventh Crusade, recounted by the chronicler Jean de Joinville.

"As I was on my way to Paris," wrote Jean, "I came across three dead men on a cart whom a clerk [a trainee priest] had killed, and I was told... that the men were three [policemen]" who



STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

As this 15th-century illustration of a battle during the early stages of the crusades shows, large numbers of men clashed on battlefields. But they were also let loose among local populations

Crime wasn't just tolerated and its perpetrators recruited to the crusaders' cause – it was sometimes even nurtured

had set out to rob local people.

On encountering the young priest, they “stripped him of all his clothes. The clerk, wearing only his chemise, went to his lodgings and took up his crossbow.” He also got hold of his falchion – a short, hefty sword with a broad, curved blade, like a machete. Chasing his assailants, he “drew his crossbow, fired and struck one of them in the heart. The other two took flight, while the clerk took up the

falchion... and chased them by the light of the moon, which was bright and clear.”

The angry clerk struck one fleeing man with his sword “and cut right through his leg so that only the boot [was] holding it on”. He then struck the other’s head with his falchion, splitting his skull down to the teeth.

The king recognised a useful man when he saw one. With ecclesiastical employment now unlikely to be an option for the triple killer, Louis gave the clerk the opportunity to make a radical career change. The church’s loss was the Seventh Crusade’s gain.

To catch a thief

Crime wasn’t just tolerated and its perpetrators recruited to the crusaders’ cause – it was even nurtured by some in the ‘wild east’ of the medieval Holy Land.

When Jean de Joinville was on crusade in the 1250s, he discovered a theft. “I asked my new servant, Guillemín, to show me his accounts, which he did,” Jean later wrote. “I found that he had cheated me out of a good 10 livres or more... I dismissed him and told him I would give him what he owed me, since he had certainly earned it.” A curious reaction? Perhaps Jean’s later discoveries – and his own actions – explain his leniency.

It transpired that Guillemín already had an extensive

criminal record. Speaking later to his servant’s previous employers, a band of Burgundian knights, Jean “learned from them that they had brought Guillemín overseas in their company, and that he was the most obliging thief that there ever was”. Indeed, he often pilfered things on their orders: “Whenever a knight was in need of gloves or spurs or anything else,” they told Jean, “Guillemín would go and steal it and then give it to him.”

Was Jean, too, party to some of Guillemín’s criminal activities? Or did his servant know things about Jean that he’d prefer left untold? We know, for instance, that Guillemín had found lodgings for them conveniently – perhaps suspiciously – close to the sex workers and bath-houses of Acre. Was that at his master’s request? And did Jean avail himself of these facilities? We don’t know – but it’s clear that, even at the highest echelons of crusading societies, crime was pervasive.

Multi-ethnic murder

Crime in the region wasn’t confined to theft. Bloodshed, fuelled by demographic imbalance, testosterone and cultural disinhibition, was endemic among the crusaders and their enemies in the region.

An episode involving Zengi, the powerful 12th-century Turkic ruler of Mosul (now in Iraq) – an opponent of the crusaders whose family had been part of that wave of migration from the steppes – was just one of thousands of examples of wanton violence.

Zengi had a predilection for murder, violence and rape, and a preference for young men. From the outset of his rule, it was said that “when he was unhappy with an amir, he would kill him... and leave that individual’s children alive but castrate them. Whenever one of his pages pleased him by his beauty he would treat him in the same way so that the characteristics of youth would last longer in him.”

Zengi’s sleeping arrangements reflected these tastes.

"A few of his servants sleep around his bed," wrote one chronicler. "He loves them as they love him and, despite their loyalty to him, he is sometimes harsh with them. They are the children of the... Turkish, Armenian and Byzantine lords."

His rule – and his life – was ended at the hands of one of those beautiful but mutilated pages. On the night of 14 September 1146, Zengi had, as usual, been drinking heavily. He slumped into a stupor and woke to find his servants, led by a Frankish slave named Yaranqash, finishing his fine wines.

Enraged, Zengi made the mistake of telling his prisoner-lover that he was going to have him killed in the morning. The Frankish eunuch, presumably also drunk, responded by killing his master and – in a final act that speaks to the high emotions involved – beheaded him for good measure.

On one level, this dramatic incident seems lurid but perhaps not too unusual. Yet consider: who were the people involved? The answer highlights the issues at the heart of the crusader crimewave.

First, everyone was male and, apart from Zengi himself, they were all young. Importantly, all were also foreigners or relatively recent arrivals. Zengi was a Turk of steppe heritage, while his assassin was said to be of European ethnicity. Others present were Byzantine or Armenians, displaced by the Turkic invasions of the preceding decades. None were Arab.

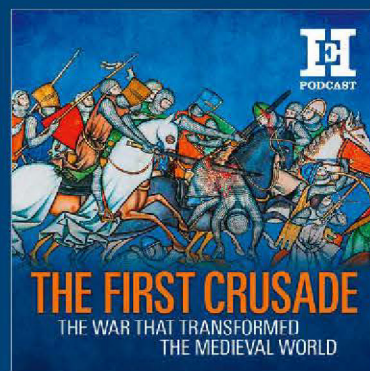
Similarly, religion wasn't a prominent factor in anyone's actions or motives. Zengi was – nominally, at

least – a Sunni Muslim, but his predilection for alcohol and mutilated slave boys suggests a less-than-orthodox approach to observance. Many, perhaps the majority, of his young lovers seem to have been from a Christian background. So the diverse origins of the people involved was a consequence of demographic forces particular to this time and place: lots of young men detached from their families and the countries of their birth.

The two centuries of conflict in the Middle East known today as the crusades sucked in a huge number of often violent young men, armed and adrift, who were let loose in the Holy Land, with profoundly scarring effects on the region. War was the most visible consequence of these forces – but criminality and pervasive civil violence were just as prevalent, and arguably even more fundamentally destructive. **H**

.....
Steve Tibble is honorary research associate at Royal Holloway, University of London. His new book is *Crusader Criminals: The Knights Who Went Rogue in the Holy Land* (Yale University Press), published in July

FIND OUT MORE IN OUR PODCAST SERIES



Explore the First Crusade with our in-depth podcast series, with contributions from Steve Tibble among others. historyextra.com/first-crusade-series



BRIDGEMAN GETTY IMAGES

TIDE OF CRIME

Shiploads of men, including merchants and mercenaries, turned to piracy in the eastern Mediterranean

As well as driving the incidence of violence and theft on land, the deluge of young men surging into the Middle East also coincided with a rise in crime at sea. Vast numbers of ships, sailors and naval entrepreneurs were drawn to the region. Crusader pirates did not feature heavily in the chronicles of the time, but evidence shows that they were always there in the background, often operating in large numbers.

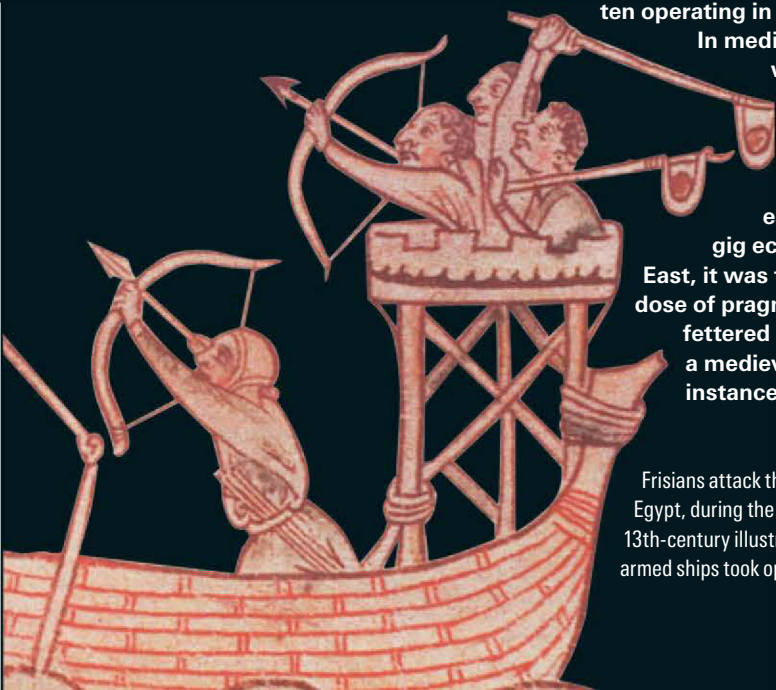
In medieval times, piracy was part of a 'portfolio career' long before anyone thought of such first-world issues as early retirement or the gig economy. In the Latin East, it was treated with a huge dose of pragmatism. Largely unfettered by legal frameworks, a medieval pirate was, in most instances, simply

someone with a ship and an opportunity. Such an opportunity might attract men from every walk of life.

Take Godric of Finchale (c1070–1170), the English ship's captain and venture capitalist who saved the life of King Baldwin I of Jerusalem, carrying him safely to Jaffa after defeat by Egyptian forces at Ramla in 1102 – thus influencing the course of crusading history. He later became a hermit monk, and even found time to write the lyrics to the earliest known English-language songs surviving with their original melodies. But he's also equated to a pirate named Godric who operated in the eastern Mediterranean at that time.

Some men arriving as crusaders engaged in slave-trading: one such was William Jiba, who operated out of Acre in the early 1140s and who was renowned for his cruelty. Even one of his customers called him "a real devil of a Frank".

There are even tales of crusading Viking pirate-knights who boasted that, en route to the Holy Land, they had landed on the north African coast to "shoot at the lions as they were spurring their horses on as hard as they could". It's a story so strange that it's probably true.



Frisians attack the tower of Damietta, Egypt, during the Fifth Crusade, in a 13th-century illustration. Men on heavily armed ships took opportunities to plunder

Long for a new look, one you can afford?

Restore the love for your kitchen



With a low cost makeover by **The Kitchen Restoration Company**

Now there's no need to replace your whole kitchen to get that smart, fresh look you long for. Simply by refacing your existing units with new doors, door fronts and worktops you'll be amazed at the transformation.

Why you should reface rather than replace

Less mess Installing a brand-new kitchen involves ripping out your existing kitchen units creating unnecessary mess and waste. **We keep them in.**

Less time A brand-new kitchen takes weeks to install and will leave you without any facilities for some of it.

We'll transform your existing kitchen in as little as a day.

Less disruption Unlike a brand-new installation, **we don't remove the cooker or sink or disconnect your power and water** leaving you free to carry on using your existing kitchen.

Less cost By keeping your unit carcasses rather than throwing them away, a refaced kitchen **can cost a fraction of a brand-new fully fitted one.**



Why choose The Kitchen Restoration Company

- We make all our own cupboard doors and drawer fronts
- Individually tailored to fit your existing kitchen perfectly
- Complete service from a simple style change to a full makeover
- Over 400 styles to choose from across 8 different ranges
- FREE home planning and design service nationwide
- Installed by our own skilled craftsmen

SPECIAL OFFER

20% off worktops

Simply enter **OFFER CODE BH4/07** on our website when requesting your brochure



"Looks like a completely new kitchen - very pleased with the end result!" **D Parnell**



Rated 'Excellent'



Based on 123 reviews



To find out more and receive your free brochure, call now, visit our website or scan the QR code

0800 91 77 238
kitchenrestoration.co.uk

THE Kitchen RESTORATION Company
Replacement doors, drawer fronts, worktops and so much more...



CROMWELL'S POSTAL SPIES

Nadine Akkerman and Pete Langman

tell the story of the first English intelligence-gathering unit, which deployed an array of cunning tricks to intercept and decode enemy communications

**Signed, sealed
and delivered**

A document is delivered by a petitioner in a mid-17th-century woodcut. The advent of organised postal services enabled shadowy officials to read private letters, even those protected by wax seals (inset)

A month before the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, the Government Code and Cypher School moved into Bletchley Park, a stately home and estate in Buckinghamshire. There it established a centre dedicated to intercepting and decoding enemy communications, playing a pivotal role in the Allied victory over Nazi Germany. But this was not the first time an operation dedicated to the interception and decoding of messages had been set up in England. Indeed, in 1655 – nearly three centuries earlier – a smaller, but remarkably similar operation had been established on the orders of England's Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell. It was christened the General Post Office.

Until the 1640s, intelligence gathering in the British Isles was a matter of individual spies reporting to their own spy chiefs – men such as Sir Francis Walsingham, the Earl of Essex, and William and Robert Cecil. As rivals competing for the favour of their monarch, cooperation was not their first instinct. Operations tended to be limited to the infiltration of groups that might harbour potential enemies, but also the occasional interception of letters exchanged between known or suspected conspirators. And that was often a tricky task.

Security detail

Before any agent could attempt to read a message contained within a letter – which might be protected through ciphers, codes or invisible inks – they had to open it, preferably without damaging it.

Long before the invention of gummed envelopes, letters were as intricate as origami birds. The paper on which the message was written was folded into its own letter-packet. Security devices included wax seals and 'locks' – pieces of paper threaded through the letter-packet that would rip upon opening, betraying the fact that the letter had been compromised. Great skill was required to deal with these anti-tamper devices; that might mean mending the damage caused by opening a letter or, when that was impossible, counterfeiting all or part of it.

The first security measure encountered was typically the seal – a blob of molten wax into which a design was pressed, simultaneously identifying the sender and preventing the letter from being easily opened. Such seals could be removed invisibly if treated with care. In the second century AD, the writer Lucian recommended using a hot needle to prise off a wax seal.

By the 16th century, though, the pliable beeswax-and-turpentine



mixture used for seals in Lucian's time had been replaced by a more secure wax. This brittle substance, prone to shattering, contained hardening substances such as gum arabic – obtained from the sap of acacia trees – or shellac, a resinous substance secreted by a species of Asian bug.

The 16th-century Italian polymath Girolamo Cardano suggested warming the wax before using a horse-tail hair to slice under the seal and detach it in one piece. This was, of course, a very delicate operation, and

Cardano recommended that less dexterous operators counterfeited the seal instead.

To do so, a new seal might be created from scratch, copying the original design and casting a facsimile in brass. This took time and no little skill, though, and would be done only for suspects responsible for high levels of correspondence. For seals newly or only occasionally encountered, a fragile plaster-like cast could be used to directly mould a new wax seal.

This process required a sample of the seal that was clear enough to be duplicated. In 1596, counter-espionage agent Arthur Gregory complained to Robert Cecil that "among so many seals... there is no choice of one perfect print". Gregory would be best able to copy a 'bare-seal', formed by pressing a seal-stamp into molten wax on the outside of the letter-packet. The other type, a 'covered' or 'papered' seal – created by dripping molten wax between the two pieces of paper to be joined – was next to impossible to counterfeit.

A counterfeiter's craft

Once a suitable seal had been identified, a cast could be made – which also required quite some preparation and skill. In his 1558 book of secrets, *Magiae Naturalis* (*Natural Magick*), polymath Giambattista della Porta suggested that, before attempting to make a cast, the counterfeiter should first "compass the seal about with wax, that the matter [the casting material] run not about". This would prevent it from staining the surrounding paper,

Some intelligence agents mastered the imitation of handwriting and cryptanalysis





Catholic conspiracy

A 17th-century woodcut shows Sir Anthony Babington and his cabal scheming to assassinate Elizabeth I – a plot foiled by intercepting letters



Why might a painting spell death?

Nadine Akkerman discusses a 'treasonous' portrait of Charles I's sister: historyextra.com/stuart-portrait



Folding notes In the 17th century, long before the introduction of gummed envelopes, an important or personal missive might be sealed using a series of intricate folds to enclose it in its own letter-packet

revealing the counterfeiter's work. He also advised that the original seal be "anointed with oil" to prevent the casting material from sticking to it. The cast, once made, carried a negative image of the seal, which could then be used to cast a new seal from wax.

When time was of the essence, a counterfeiter's choice of casting material was all-important. Nothing was so likely to put the wind up conspirators as a letter taking 12 days to reach its recipients when it ought to have been there in four. Excessive delay in delivery of a letter was a telltale indicator of possible interception.

To avoid such revealing delays, Arthur Gregory aimed to formulate a casting compound that dried at speed and to a metallic hardness – with unfortunate consequences. In February 1586, while working to perfect his 'sealing metal', he wrote to Walsingham: "I prepared a singular piece of the usual metal to show the same to your Lordship, but a sudden swelling in one of my eyes did prevent me." A decade later, he connected his activities with recent afflictions: "With the making of metal this last night I have gotten an unsteadiness in my hand which will not leave me for a few days."

Though it's impossible to be sure – Gregory failed to leave behind a recipe book for posterity – it seems likely that the formula he worked to perfect was inspired by della Porta, who used toxic ingredients such as ceruse (white lead), verdi-

gris (copper carbonate) and quicksilver (mercury), any one of which might have caused Gregory's symptoms.

As well as counterfeiting seals, intelligence agents like Gregory also sought to master the imitation of handwriting and particular letterlocking styles, translation, cryptanalysis and myriad other tasks.

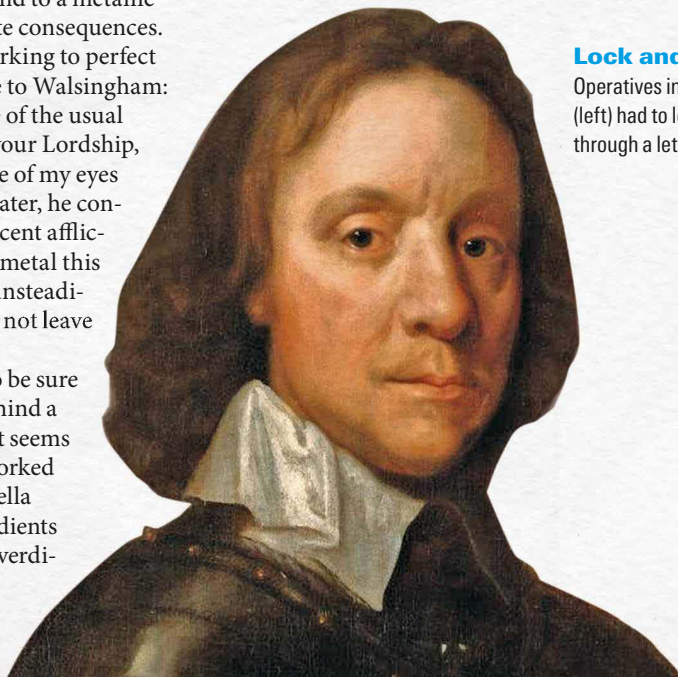
Going postal

During the time of Walsingham and the Cecils, intelligence operatives worked on an ad-hoc basis – and often alone. Their efforts sometimes delivered tangible results – for example, foiling the Babington Plot of 1586,

a scheme to assassinate Elizabeth I and put Mary, Queen of Scots on the throne. But the lack of a centralised and resourced surveillance system could allow conspiracies to blossom unchecked.

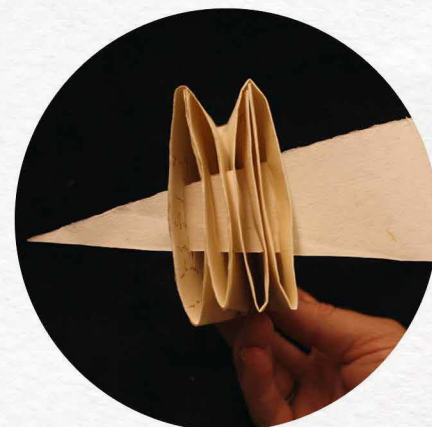
After the execution of Charles I in 1649, the nature of intelligence gathering changed. Oliver Cromwell, ruling as Lord Protector from 1653, was aware that the British Isles was shot through with supporters of Charles Stuart, son of the executed king. So he created a system of surveillance with the aim of controlling the primary method of communicating information over distance: the letter.

In 1655, Cromwell installed his secretary



Lock and key

Operatives in the Black Chamber created under Oliver Cromwell (left) had to learn to crack a 'lock' – a piece of paper threaded through a letter-packet (below) or a cipher



THE BATTLE TO ELUDE PRYING EYES

Many of the missives opened in the Black Chamber were protected by clever alphabet and word-substitution systems

If you needed to send a secret message in a letter that might well be intercepted and read by others, how might you protect that message? One way was by using ciphers or codes.

At its simplest, a **cipher** is a system in which the individual letters are replaced by other letters, numerals or symbols, producing what is known as a substitution alphabet: 'a' might, for instance, be written as /, 'b' as 7, and so on (see below).

Such ciphers are relatively easy to crack using frequency analysis – that is, by counting characters. Because 'e' is the most frequently used letter in English, for example, whichever letter, numeral or symbol appears most often in the cipher text is very likely to represent this vowel. Simple substitution ciphers quickly reveal their secrets when interrogated using frequency analysis and a little pattern recognition.

Several techniques could be employed to make cracking substitution ciphers more difficult and, most importantly, more time-consuming. But another approach was also used: codes.

In a **code**, each *word* is replaced by a letter, numeral or symbol. A list of these, known as a 'nomenclator', might

include names, titles, objects, syllables and common words. So King might be represented by 1, Queen = 2, Paris = 12, ship = 25, therefore = 42.

Sender and recipient would work from the same plan, known as a 'key', which would contain one or more substitution alphabets, and a nomenclator with anything from 10 to 1000 entries. These nomenclators were created to frustrate cryptanalytical techniques such as frequency analysis. This sparked a never-ending battle for supremacy between cryptographers and cryptanalysts.

The best ciphers and codes were easy to decrypt if you had the cipher key, but very difficult to crack if you did not. Getting the balance right could be tricky. While imprisoned in Carisbrooke Castle on the Isle of Wight in 1648, Charles I bemoaned the problems created by overdoing things. "Ther is so much in Cypher from K: [aka Lady d'Aubigny] that I doe not thinke fitt to stay this Packet upon the decyphering of them," he wrote, "because it will cost more then a dayes worke."

A key for a cipher and a code, in which letters and words were replaced by other letters, numbers and symbols



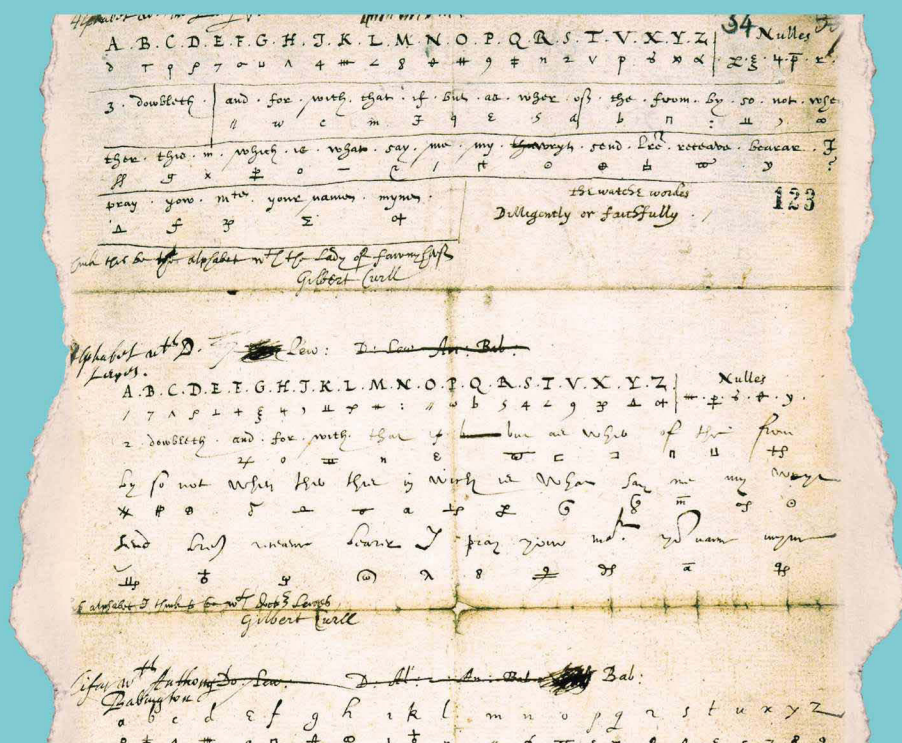
Dangerous advice Italian Giambattista della Porta, depicted on the frontispiece of one of his books, offered tips for those aiming to counterfeit a wax seal

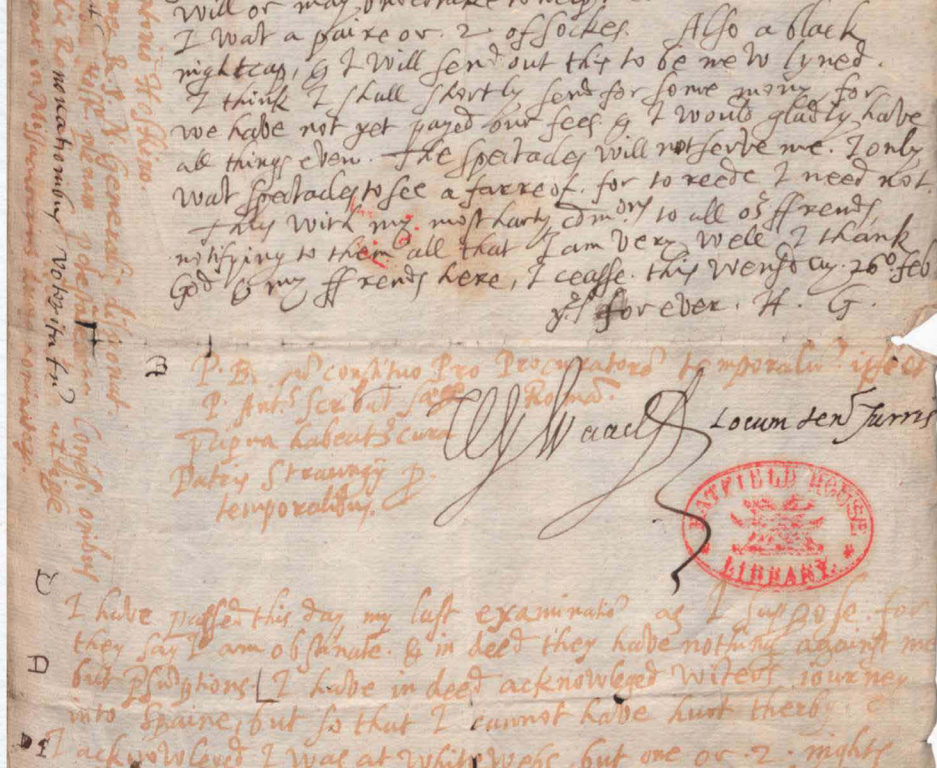
of state and head of intelligence, John Thurloe, as postmaster general of a new institution, the General Post Office. His reasoning became clear in 1657, when *An Act for Setting the Postage of England, Scotland and Ireland* stated that the founding of "one general Post Office" would allow the Commonwealth to "discover and prevent many dangerous, and wicked designs... the intelligence whereof cannot well be communicated, but by letter". Cromwell's Post Office, then, was created not only to deliver letters but also to intercept them.

Surveillance system

The idea of using a postal monopoly for the comprehensive surveillance of communication was nothing new. In the 1630s, Alexandrine, Countess of Taxis, was described as "a troublesome busy Woeman, [who] will open letters, [and] hath counterfeit seales of publicke Ministers". Alexandrine's family held the monopoly on postal services throughout the Holy Roman Empire – in other words, most of western Europe. Between 1628 and 1646, while she minded the family business until her young son came of age, she developed a system by which letters were methodically opened and inspected for valuable information before being resealed and sent on their way, their recipients (generally) none the wiser. The information was then sold to the highest bidder.

Alexandrine's operatives worked in a back room of what we would now call a post office. Similarly secreted offices known as *cabinets noir* ('black chambers') later popped up in Paris and Vienna.





White lines

A letter written by gunpowder plot conspirator Henry Garnett in 1606 contained substantial additional text in invisible ink – but it was made legible, read and counterfeited, and this original kept behind as evidence. It was counter-espionage agent Arthur Gregory who counterfeited the letter – invisible ink and all – and sent it onwards, fooling Garnett and his correspondents completely

The interception of letters was not uncontroversial. When Stuart diplomat and art broker Balthazar Gerbier realised that someone in Alexandrine's office was opening and reading his letters, he complained of the "violation of his sacred letter-packets". And in 1642, Lucius Cary, 2nd Viscount Falkland and Charles I's secretary of state, argued that the opening of private mail was "a violation of the law of nature that no qualification by office could justify a single person in the trespass". For Cromwell, however, the needs of the state justified riding roughshod over private delicacy.

Processing plant

Cromwell's postmaster general, John Thurloe, set up his Black Chamber in the 'Queen's Closet' of the palace of Whitehall, London. In this room, decorated with gold leaf, his men processed all of the official mail sent into and out of the capital, as well as that between England and the continent.

The Black Chamber aimed to provide continuous surveillance, and employed several operatives on what was effectively a production line that sought to systematically interrogate suspect letters. The work was conceptually simple but in practice complex, demanding and time-consuming. The volume of post was too large for everything to be opened, so operatives concentrated efforts on letters for which addressees, recipients, handwriting or seals were already on their watch list.

Once identified, these letters were opened and read, and any suspect contents copied, translated, deciphered or decoded as necessary. They were then resealed and sent on to their recipients to avoid spooking any conspirators before enough evidence had been gathered to catch them all.

By the time of the Restoration, Thurloe

had, understandably, made his exit, but the Black Chamber itself remained as part of the fabric of government. By then, its operatives were virtually civil servants. The regime may have changed, but two of the more skilled employees, Isaac Dorislaus and Samuel Morland, remained in office to serve the new monarch, Charles II. (This is perhaps all the more surprising when you consider that Dorislaus's father had been listed as one of the regicides, accused of involvement in the sentencing and execution of Charles I, and had been murdered by royalists in May 1649.)

Morland, a natural entrepreneur in the 'dangerous trade', was more than happy to boast of his own victories – presumably safe in the knowledge that they were unlikely to be contradicted – especially when lobbying for cash from the restored king. He claimed that he had saved Charles's life through the "dexterous opening and Sealing up of one letter Sealed carefully with a Wafer", and that "by this Art of opening letters & Seals, and copying out dispatches in a moments time &c. were very great services done to King Charles 2".

Morland was something of a polymath. A keen inventor, he not-so-quietly took over the role of early modern Q earlier filled by Arthur Gregory. In 1664, he was granted an audience with Charles II, during which he demonstrated a series of "models in little of several engines and utensils" he had designed to help automate the counterfeiting skills on which the Black Chamber relied. Finding it impossible to distinguish counterfeits from the original letters, the king ordered that Morland's methods be put into practice.

Like Bletchley Park, the 17th-century Black Chamber drew together an array of talented counter-espionage experts and supported them with cutting-edge technologies. Unlike Bletchley Park, however, neither the Black Chamber nor any of its devices survived to be investigated further. When writing his memoirs in 1689, Morland recounted how another of his innovations, a machine that could copy entire documents in mere minutes, was used "at the General Post Office until at the Fire of London the apparatus was destroyed and was not set up again".

Perhaps it's apt that this covert unit, and the tools it used to such effect in counter-espionage, effectively vanished – virtually without trace. **H**

Nadine Akkerman is professor of early modern literature and culture at Leiden University.

Pete Langman is a writer and academic. Their new book is *Spycraft: Tricks and Tools of the Dangerous Trade from Elizabeth I to the Restoration* (Yale University Press, 2024)

The Black Chamber drew together talented counter-espionage experts supported with cutting-edge tech

Q&A

A selection of historical **conundrums** answered by experts

What was the Erfurt Latrine Disaster?

►► In the summer of 1184, German king Henry VI convoked a *Hoftag* (informal assembly) at Erfurt, capital of Thuringia, in what's now central Germany. This gathering aimed to bring to an end the bitter conflict between Conrad of Wittelsbach, archbishop of Mainz, and Louis III, Landgrave of Thuringia.

In a period when political tensions between the Holy Roman Empire's patchwork of bishoprics, princedoms and myriad city-states were rife, Henry was determined to resolve this. So he summoned numerous aristocrats and high-ranking officials from across the empire to the meeting, which was held in St Peter's Church.

Delegates flooded into the town, some arriving the day before the meeting commenced, on 26 July. However, soon after proceedings began, catastrophe struck. The ageing wooden floor of the church suddenly gave way under the attendees' combined weight, sending dozens of nobles plummeting into the foetid cesspool below the building.

A disaster ensued, and an estimated 60 to 100 people perished – crushed, drowned or asphyxiated by the fumes emitted by the latrine's rotting sewage.

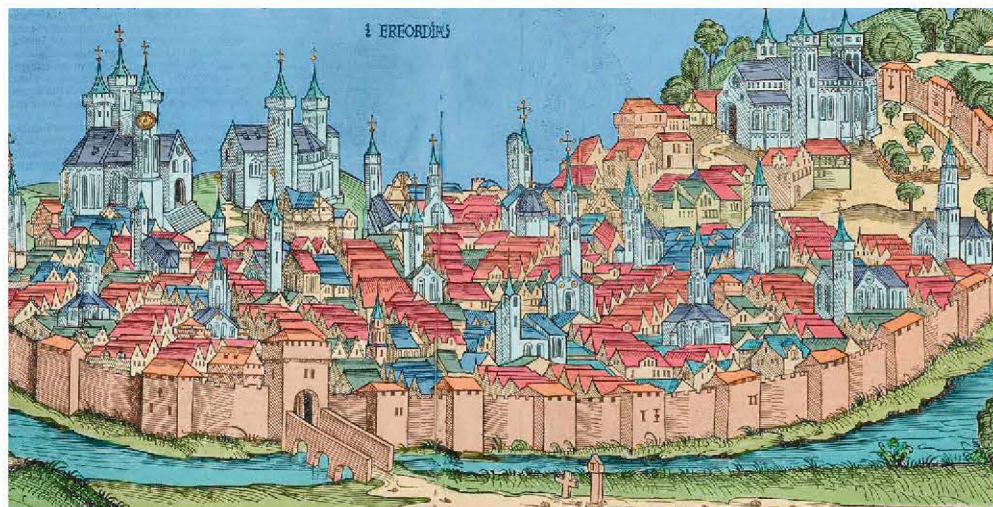
Yet, miraculously, all of the key players in the dispute survived. Henry (below) and Conrad managed to escaped death by clinging to iron window railings.

Medieval latrines, primitive and often perilously constructed, were a far cry from the luxuries of modern sanitation. The Erfurt tragedy, one of the era's most bizarre incidents, starkly highlighted the dangers of such basic facilities.

Henry's survival on that fateful day remains a 'sliding doors' moment in European history, which might have unfolded in very different ways had he perished in the cesspit at Erfurt. As it was, his influence continued to grow over the years that followed. He became Holy Roman Emperor in 1191, captured Richard the Lionheart, and expanded his realm to encompass the Kingdom of Sicily.

.....

Danny Bird, staff writer,
BBC History Magazine



A coloured 15th-century engraving depicts the fortified German city of Erfurt, where the assembly called by King Henry VI in 1184 ended in disaster



Pastes have been used to clean teeth since ancient times, but as this Colgate advertisement highlights, the modern era revolutionised oral hygiene

Who invented toothpaste?

►► Oral hygiene and toothpaste specifically have a long history reaching back millennia. Around 3,000 BC, the ancient Egyptians created a dental paste from oxen hooves, myrrh, eggshells, pumice and water. They even used a rudimentary type of toothbrush to clean their teeth by chewing on a frayed twig.

The ancient Chinese, Greeks and Romans also developed their own pastes using materials such as ground bones, oyster shells and charcoal.

From the late 1700s, homemade toothpaste incorporated ingredients like burnt bread and even crushed ceramics. In 1824, a dentist known as Dr Peabody added soap to his concoction. By 1873, Colgate had begun mass-producing toothpaste in jars. The collapsible receptacle commonly used today debuted in 1892 courtesy of Dr Washington Sheffield and was inspired by artists' paint tubes.

After the Second World War, soap was replaced with emulsifying agents, and the addition of fluoride became commonplace. Whitening agents emerged in the 1980s. Meanwhile, the toothbrush we recognise today was only introduced in 1938. Unlike their ancient forebears, today's toothpastes have ditched abrasive ingredients that erode tooth enamel. **DB**

Why did Tudor men wear codpieces?

»» The codpiece was a curious but common feature of men's dress in the 16th century, placed provocatively at the groin yet rarely attracting comments in contemporary sources.

The word 'codd' had for centuries meant a purse, a pouch or padding. But it was also used for the testicles or scrotum, with parallels in other northern European languages – the Old Norse *koddi*, for example. A piece of advice issued to young men in the late 15th century said: "Put not your hands in your hosen, your codware for to clawe."

The leg coverings called hose originally consisted of two long, separate legs tied to a doublet. The gap between the hose was covered by a flat flap of fabric tied in place. That evolved into the codpiece, fastened at the waist for ease of dressing and undressing as well as providing access for bodily functions. It was tied with short points – laces with metal tags at each end – through eyelets reinforced with thread.

Ubiquitous portraits of Henry VIII and other rulers wearing codpieces, along with surviving metal armours featuring such protuberances, might suggest that this item was a peculiarity of powerful European men. But the codpiece was not confined to elite clothing. *Braguette*, the French equivalent of the word codpiece, suggests its symbolic purpose, but for most men it was simply a functional part of legwear.

A mid-16th-century source refers to "a kodpese like a pokett" – modest wool Tudor examples at the Museum of London are padded pouches. They were not, however, 'penis sheaths', despite a 1555 reference to men in the New World who "enclose their privy members in a gourd, cut after the fashion of a codpiece".

A misunderstanding of how codpieces functioned has led to speculation that they evolved to enable medicinal treatments for syphilis. This erroneous theory rests on the mistaken notion that a codpiece formed a roomy box inside which the genitals could lie, having been slathered with greasy salves and bandaged in place. Yet the penis did not in fact go into the codpiece but lay inside the hose; the codpiece was an appendage on the outside of the garment.



Ferdinand, son of the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I, displays his protruding, ornately decorated codpiece in this 1548 portrait

Codpieces became less common towards the end of the 16th century, as tailored, close-fitting, full-length hose gave way to shorter and looser styles such as venetians, which were knee-length breeches worn with knitted stockings. Shakespeare's words in *King Lear* are telling: "Marry, here's grace and a codpiece; that's a wise man and a fool." By the early 17th century, when he wrote his great tragedy, codpieces were no longer conventional wear and were likely seen as the fashion of fools.

.....
Dr Jane Malcolm-Davies, associate professor, University of Copenhagen

DID YOU KNOW...?

Short-lived saint

Eight churches in England are dedicated to a saint who lived for only three days. Rumwold (or Rumbold), the grandson of King Penda of Mercia, was born in the mid-seventh century. Shortly after his birth, this precocious infant is reported to have declared three times: "I am a Christian!", and asked to be baptised. The following day, he preached a sermon on virtuous living. On his third day, he announced that he would die shortly – which he promptly did.

Beefy brand

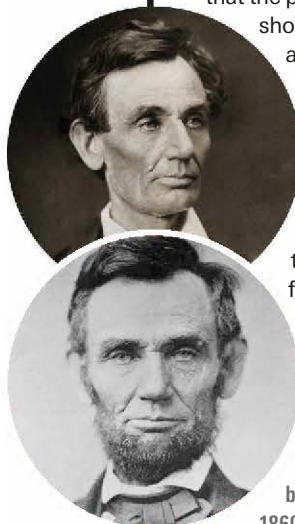
The beef extract Bovril owes its name to a Victorian work of science fiction. John Lawson Johnston's savoury drink was first sold in the 1870s as Johnston's Fluid Beef. He was later inspired to rebrand it with the more familiar name after reading Edward Bulwer-Lytton's 1871 novel *The Coming Race*, a story about a subterranean species of superior beings that gained their powers from a substance called 'Vril'. Johnston combined that word with the first two letters of 'bovine' to make his new brand name: Bovril.

Face of power

In October 1860, Abraham Lincoln was encouraged to grow a beard by a letter from an 11-year-old girl who thought it would improve his looks. Grace Bedell, whose father was a strong supporter of Lincoln, wrote that the presidential candidate should grow his whiskers as he "would look a great deal better for your face is so thin". Lincoln wrote back to Grace, promising nothing – but a month later he grew the beard that is today so familiar from later photos.

.....
Nick Rennison, writer and journalist specialising in history

Abraham Lincoln, pictured beardless after his election in 1860 – and later with whiskers, as advised by a young admirer



WHY DO WE SAY...

...pay through the nose?

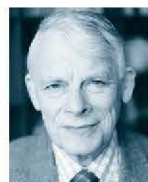
» It's not unusual to discover that the source of an obscure word or enigmatic phrase is unknown or uncertain. A good explanation of the idiom 'to pay through the nose' – meaning to pay an exorbitant price – seems to exist, yet the question remains open.

It's been suggested that 'nose' is a garbled variant of 'noose'. Alternatively, it's been claimed that the term refers to a nose tax on Swedes levied by the Scandinavian god Odin. However, no pre-1666 citations of the idiom exist – far too late for Odin. A nose tax was indeed levied – but a 'nose' was simply a body part used to represent an individual person, just as in 'all hands on deck' or '10 head of cattle'.

In 1898, Richard Edgecumbe wrote a letter to the periodical *Notes and Queries* and commented on the matter "from the personal experience as a midshipman". The reference,

he said, was to paying out a chain cable through the nose and "paying it handsomely". According to him, the expression was originally common on board ship. It is not very difficult, he added, to associate such "handsome payments" with extortionate disbursements. No one seems to have discussed this reasonable explanation (a common occurrence with fugitive notes in old journals).

Though English is full of nautical metaphors, the origin of some is not always evident – such as, among many others, 'by and large'. 'To pay through the nose' may also be one of them.



Anatoly Liberman, professor and author of *An Analytic Dictionary of English Etymology* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008)



ILLUSTRATION BY GLEN MCBETH



A woman pours vinegar from a barrel in a 14th-century illustration. Was vinegar the first substance fermented using a Scoby?

When was a Scoby first used?

» A symbiotic culture of bacteria and yeasts, or Scoby, is used in the production of fermented foods and drinks such as kefir, kombucha and vinegar. It is a stable, harmonious community of different microbial species providing nutrients, shelter and other benefits to each other. It can take the form of a skin atop a liquid. Also known as a 'mother', it is often passed on between people and across generations.

To try to date the first Scoby, we must find the earliest evidence of these ferments. Kombucha has a very murky history (and more than 160 names); it may have emerged in Qin-dynasty China in the third century BC, though that's not entirely certain.

It's been suggested that kefir was drunk by the ancient nomadic Alans of the North Caucasus, but regional mentions seem to date back only to around the 19th century. However, consider the world's oldest known cheese, discovered in the early Bronze Age cemetery of Xiaohu in western China. Thought to be about 3,600 years old, it contains microbial strains associated with kefir, suggesting that the cheese was a kind of strained kefir curd.

The first surviving mention of vinegar goes back to around 3000 BC, when Babylonians produced wine and then vinegar from the date palm. It's unclear, though, whether that fermentation was starter-based or spontaneous.

It's almost certain that the process for making all starter-based ferments began spontaneously before being refined into something repeatable. But it seems vinegar came first – unless you consider bread (yes, sourdough 'starter' is also a Scoby!)

James Read, writer and fermentation expert



The 1969 moon landing had an estimated audience of 150 million, including these people at John F Kennedy International Airport in New York

What was the most-viewed television broadcast?

»»» The most commonly cited answer is the 1969 moon landing. Historically, though, television ratings have relied on very selective sampling – and are a can of worms. This February, newspapers excitedly proclaimed the Super Bowl one of the most-watched programmes in US television history, with 123.4 million viewers – close to the c150 million often quoted for Neil Armstrong's first lunar steps. But some 16 million people in Britain also watched in 1969 – far more than watched the Super Bowl in 2024. Add up the global numbers and, according to one estimate, some 650 million were glued to their sets for Armstrong's big moment.

In terms of solely British ratings, honours are roughly even between broadcasts including the 1966 World Cup final, a Christmas episode of the BBC soap opera *EastEnders*, and the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales – each watched by just over 30 million.

International comparisons are skewed by each country's population size. It's suggested that 340 million Indians watched their team's 2011 Cricket World Cup match against Sri Lanka. China's state broadcaster claimed more than 700 million viewers for its coverage of the 2013 Spring Festival Gala. All are estimates, some wilder than others, but big sporting events dominate – notably football finals.

A definitive answer remains elusive, simply because some programmes that have small initial audiences accumulate very high ratings over time. Think of all those episodes of *Friends* or *The Simpsons* or the biggest Latin American telenovelas, all on eternal repeat somewhere in the world. Yet, as the number of channels and platforms proliferate, opportunities for a globally shared television experience have diminished. Which makes the 1969 moon landing still as good an answer as any.

.....
David Hendy, emeritus professor in media and cultural history at the University of Sussex



A limited-edition 35-bar assortment set of KitKats is launched in 2018 to celebrate the 45th anniversary of the treat's arrival in Japan

What's behind Japan's love for KitKats?

»»» The British confectioner Rowntree's launched the KitKat in 1935. The appeal of this four-finger chocolate wafer bar lay in its unassuming nature, and it was marketed as a welcome respite from the daily grind.

Four decades later, in 1973, KitKat made its debut in Japan, initially licensed by Fujiya. Capitalising on its 'exotic' novelty, early television adverts depicted British soldiers savouring the treat. Phonetically, the brand name sounds remarkably like the Japanese phrase '*Kitto katsu*', meaning 'you will surely win'. This guaranteed the KitKat instant

popularity with the Japanese people, and it proved especially alluring to students during exam season.

By the 21st century, the country's devotion to KitKats had almost become a kind of secular religion. Since 2000, a dizzying array of flavours – from matcha tea to strawberry – has been rolled out. Today, there are more than 300 different types to sample. You can even buy special editions to complement the Japanese tradition of *Omiyage*, whereby travellers share treats with family and friends acquired on their journeys. **DB H**



Over the past century, kitchens have evolved more than any room in the home. **Deborah Sugg Ryan** charts Britain's long quest for space and efficiency – from fly-repellent cabinets to the ubiquitous air-fryer



Counter revolution

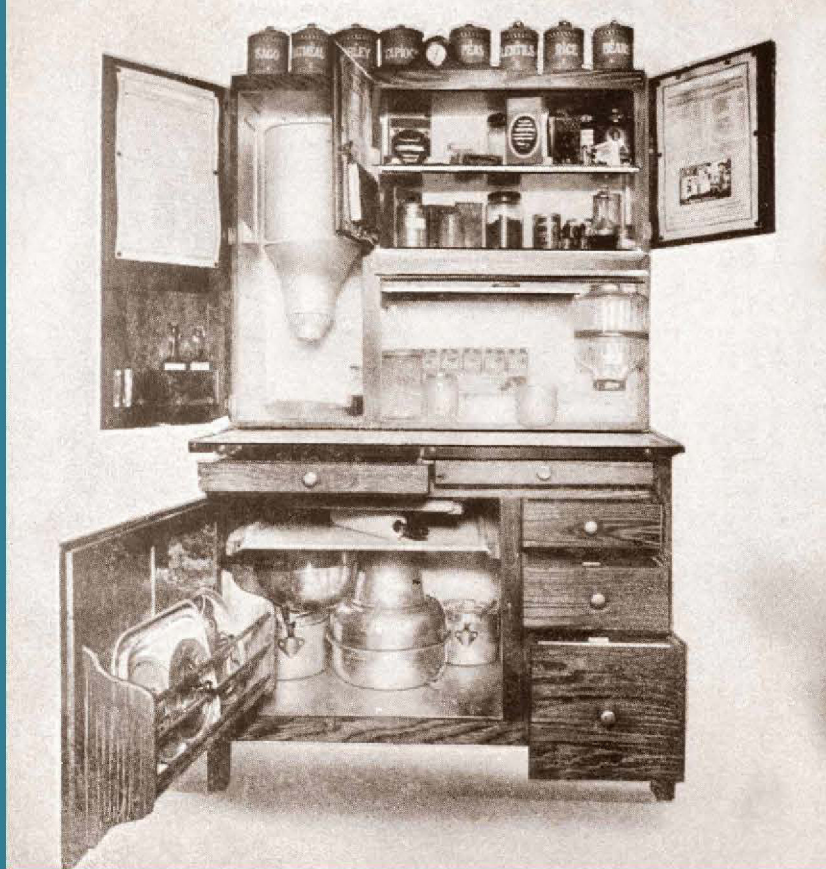
Accompanies
the BBC Radio 4
documentary
Fitted and Kitted

BBC
RADIO **4**

The evolution of kitchens



Mucking in By the 1890s, working-class kitchen-living rooms – like this one from Blists Hill Victorian Town – benefited from running water



Flour power Kitchen cabinets – like this example from the 1930s, complete with funnel-shaped flour dispenser – were a mainstay of British homes between the wars

When my grandparents moved to a prefab in Plumstead in 1946, they became the proud owners of the most modern kitchen they had ever encountered. It was, my Nanny Nora recalled, “a housewife’s dream”. Like many of the residents of the more than 150,000 prefabricated houses (aka ‘prefabs’) that were erected in Britain between 1946 and 1949, this was her first experience of a fitted kitchen. It had a galley arrangement of base and wall cupboards, continuous worktop, a metal sink and even a refrigerator.

Throughout her life, my nan loved to have an immaculate modern kitchen but she hated cooking. Instead, she embraced convenience food and the microwave. She was bemused when I installed an open-plan kitchen in my house. Why on Earth would I want to eat in the kitchen with all that mess on display?

From the vantage point of 2024, this question can seem rather quaint. For millions of Britons today, eating in the kitchen is second nature – and the open-plan kitchen (that multi-purpose space where we store, prepare and cook food, host friends and, since the pandemic, carry out a day’s work) has become something of a status symbol.

How things have changed. At the dawn of the 20th century, it was only the working and lower-middle classes who cooked, ate and socialised in a single room. In wealthier households, the tasks of storing, preparing,

cooking and eating food were performed in distinct areas. Food preparation was confined to the kitchen, dishes were washed in the scullery (often in the basement), while meals were taken in an entirely different dining room. In bigger houses there would be a separate pantry as well as a larder.

Since then, society has evolved beyond all recognition, and so has the kitchen. In fact, it has probably been subject to more changes than any other room in our houses. Because of the way gender roles were historically divided, this reflects the evolving status of women: from mistress of the household and ‘maid-of-all-work’ to home economist and multi-tasking homemaker.

Poorly paid isolation

Britain’s kitchen revolution began to gather momentum in the wake of the First World War when the country was beset by a servant crisis. During the conflict, hundreds of thousands of working-class women had answered the call to work in munitions factories and other traditionally male-dominated industries. This was meant to be a short-term solution. But many of these women preferred their new vocation to the poor pay and isolation of being a ‘maid-of-all-work’ in the homes of the wealthy – and chose not to return.

Meanwhile, soaring inflation persuaded many middle-class families that they could no longer afford to employ servants. The question was, who – or what – was going to fill the gap

vacated by the long-suffering maidservant?

One possible solution lay across the Atlantic. In the second decade of the 20th century, the American home economist Christine Frederick began drawing on time and motion studies originally developed for factories to promote the idea of a labour-saving kitchen to aid women now increasingly seen as professional housewives. It wasn’t long before Frederick’s research had reached the German textile artist and designer Benita Otte, who conceived what is arguably the world’s first fitted kitchen in 1923.

Otte was a member of the hugely influential Bauhaus School, which made its name championing the rationalist principles of Modernism such as ‘form follows function’. Her compact kitchen was solely devoted to the preparation of food, with simple wall-mounted cupboards boasting hygienic flush doors, painted white, mounted over a continuous worktop. It was intended to eliminate unnecessary movement and streamline the cooking process. The principles of her trailblazing design represent the essence of what we understand to be a fitted kitchen today.

Christine Frederick’s ideas would go on to gain wider influence through the Austrian architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, who designed a fitted kitchen for a mass housing project in Frankfurt. Some 10,000 were installed between 1926 and 1932.

Schütte-Lihotzky’s deliberately narrow, compact kitchen was not only the result of space constraints but also a preoccupation



A new era One of Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky's trailblazing fitted kitchens, designed for Frankfurt homes in the 1920s



Domestic bliss

A Hygena advert from the 1950s. By now, the fitted kitchen, replete with gleaming mod cons, was celebrated in Hollywood films

with shaving time off kitchen tasks. It positioned women as sole workers in the kitchen, servicing their families efficiently. You entered the kitchen via a sliding door on one of the short walls. Opposite this was a worktop with a stool on revolving castors. On the left was a freestanding cooker and, on the right, a sink and wall cabinets. Cupboards included labelled metal storage bins and a removable waste drawer. The wooden cabinets were even painted in a shade of blue that, it was claimed, repelled flies.

Although it was intended to liberate users from the drudgery of the kitchen by allowing tasks to be completed as efficiently as possible, Schütte-Lihotzky's brainchild was not always received positively. Some women complained that it isolated them from their families and made it difficult to look after children. When it was rolled out in housing schemes in Finland, others lamented that it left little room for cherished items of furniture that had been passed down the generations. Families squeezed their table into the kitchen to allow them to eat there and their children to do homework, even if they had to do so in shifts.

The greatest stepsaver?

Britons were slower to adopt the fitted kitchen than many of their counterparts on the continent. From Colchester to Cardiff, Exeter to Edinburgh, the freestanding kitchen cupboard cabinet, otherwise known as the 'kitchenette', held sway. As domestic advice writer Nancie Clifton Reynold observed in

Britons could only look on in envy at the dream American kitchen, with its streamlined fridge full of food

1929: "In the really modern kitchen, where the method of a place for everything and everything in its place is followed, and where space is of the utmost importance, there is nothing to compare with the kitchen cabinet for convenience. It is true that the compact cabinet is the greatest stepsaver yet invented."

Kitchen cabinets had emerged in the United States in the 1890s and were popularised by the manufacturer Hoosier. They comprised a base cupboard, sometimes with drawers, topped by a pull-out enamelled worktop. Above this was a shallower cupboard whose doors revealed shelves with storage compartments, equipped with jars and containers and a special funnel-shaped 'hopper' to dispense flour.

Britain caught the kitchen cabinet bug in the mid-1920s when they became available in

a range of prices (a version brought to the market by Hygena in 1925 proved particularly popular). They would remain a mainstay of British homes throughout the interwar housebuilding boom, often being offered in situ in suburban semis.

While Britain's passion for kitchen cabinets intensified, Americans were transferring their affections elsewhere – to an ever more sophisticated fitted kitchen industry. Leading the charge was Lilian Moller Gilbreth – psychologist, industrial engineer and mother of 12 – who applied time and motion studies she developed with her husband, Frank Bunker Gilbreth, to the organisation of family life. Such studies led Lilian to advocate a kitchen triangle plan of cooker, fridge and sink that is still in widespread use today.

The Gilbreths' research was showcased in the book *Cheaper by the Dozen*, published in 1948. By now, America stood on the cusp of an economic boom – and that boom was reflected in the home. Soon, American kitchens boasted modular cabinets in an array of primary and pastel colours, with coordinating cookers, fridges and even dishwashers. These dream kitchens, with their streamlined fridges full of food, were immortalised in Hollywood films and TV series such as *I Love Lucy* (1951–57). British audiences, who were subject to food rationing until 1954, could only look on in wonder and envy.

But British consumers weren't completely frozen out from this brave new world of domestic form and function. In the postwar

APPLIANCES OF SCIENCE

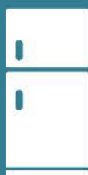
Five leaps forward in kitchen technology



In 1923, the **New World Gas Cooker with a Regulo Thermostat** made its debut. The appliance revolutionised cooking, as its temperature could be controlled by a dial.

72%

The percentage of homes **supplied with electricity** when the National Grid was completed in 1938. Previously, the adoption of electrical appliances was held back by variances in the voltage between towns.



In 1959, only **13% of UK households owned a fridge**; by 1970, that number had soared to 58%.



The **first domestic model of the microwave** was sold in the UK in 1974. British kitchens would never be the same again.

49.5%

The percentage of British households that owned a dishwasher in 2023, almost a century after William Howard Livens **invented a small non-electric dishwasher** for the UK domestic market in 1924.

period, those with the aspiration (and, more pertinently, the money) could buy American-style fitted kitchens in aluminium from companies such as English Rose. And, of course, fitted kitchens graced many of the thousands of prefabs constructed across Britain in the aftermath of war.

Few fitted kitchens were more popular than those produced by the Hygena Company, whose colourful and innovative designs dominated the market until the 1970s. At the heart of Hygena's offering was that hard, durable plastic known as Formica – or, as marketers preferred to call it, 'the surface with a smile'. By the mid-1950s, Hygena's F range was fully prefabricated (and fully clad in Formica) and offered in a range of colours, with the most popular being red worktops, blue doors and white drawers.

The culture of buying and fitting kitchens was also evolving. Hygena's advertising in the early 1970s stressed that their cabinets were available in single units that could be bought one at a time, enabling consumers to build up their kitchen piece-by-piece. However, in 1976 Hygena cautioned would-be DIYers against building their 'Continental' kitchen from flat-pack boxes. The 'Hygena man', the company (perhaps unsurprisingly) urged, could do the job much more quickly. Yet, despite such warnings, it wasn't long before flat-pack retailers such as MFI were muscling-in on the scene. The age of the self-build kitchen had arrived.

It wasn't just DIYers who posed a threat to Hygena's business model. The second half of the 1970s witnessed the rise of the 'country' kitchen, as a yearning for simpler times – exemplified by Tom and Barbara in the hit BBC sitcom *The Good Life* – washed over the nation. Where Formica-clad modernity had once reigned supreme, now Britons hankered after antique dressers stripped of their paint and varnish, and pine doors with traditional mouldings and wooden or brass knobs. Terence Conran's Habitat store – not to mention his kitchen books – popularised what the historian Ben Highmore has called 'spontaneous informality' around a stripped pine kitchen table, influenced by continental holidays and cookery.

Marks of individuality

The 1970s and 80s witnessed a number of societal shifts that would have a direct impact on kitchen design. In 1973, women in Britain were allowed, for the first time, to take out a loan or credit card without having to rely on their husband or father as a guarantor. This meant that they now had more say in the purchase of new kitchens – and advertising and design changed accordingly. Whereas, in the 1960s, kitchens in larger homes were often





New recipes A Hygena kitchen with easy-to-clean Formica-clad units, pictured in 1964



Island dreams The new millennium saw the rise in popularity of the kitchen island, housed here in an extension with bifold doors leading out into the garden



From Victorian beef fritters to WW2 crumb fudge Check out our historical recipes hub at historyextra.com/historical-recipes



In Keeping Up Appearances, Hyacinth Bucket takes out an ad to proclaim she has a new fitted kitchen

divided from dining rooms by a hatch through which the housewife served her family, now they were increasingly being replaced by open-plan designs with a peninsular or breakfast bar.

The kitchen industry was given a further boost by the 1980 'Right to Buy' legislation that saw installing a new kitchen as a mark of individuality amid a boom in private ownership. These aspirations were immortalised in an episode of 1990s BBC sitcom *Keeping Up Appearances* in which Hyacinth Bucket (pictured above) tries to take out an ad in the local newspaper to proclaim that she has installed a new fitted kitchen.

While TV in the 1990s reflected Britons' evolving tastes in kitchen design, by the new millennium it was driving them – thanks, in part, to the inexorable rise of the celebrity chef. From the early 2000s, the likes of Nigella Lawson, Ainsley Harriott and Jamie Oliver were beamed into millions of homes on an almost daily basis.

And the piece of hardware on which they prepared their culinary masterpieces was often the kitchen island, which proved the perfect surface on which to cook while presenting to camera. It wasn't long before the island became an object of desire for homeowners across the country.

By now, the rise of the TV cookery show – not to mention the popularity of sitcoms such as *Friends*, many of whose scenes were played out in kitchen-diners – was influencing a trend for open-plan performative designs, often accompanied by industrial stainless surfaces and appliances.

All the while, British homeowners were subject to a Norse invasion. The advent of the first Ikea store in 1987 saw simpler, Scandinavian-inspired styles shape domestic kitchens. In 1996, one campaign launched by the Swedish company urged the British to

turn their backs on tradition and “chuck out your chintz”.

Sharing space

This was less than three decades ago, but much has changed since. Home ownership has been in decline since the financial crash of 2008, meaning that many have little choice over the design of their kitchen, and that it is often a space that is rented and shared with others. Open-plan has perhaps lost some of its allure since the lockdowns of 2020–21 when multiple people in the same household started working from home. So, what might the kitchen of the future look like?

We are, I am happy to report, moving towards a more sustainable kitchen that can be manufactured from old units and endlessly recycled. The dream kitchen of 2024 affords a multiplicity of functions and uses; not only cooking and eating but also leisure, entertaining and work. It can even incorporate space for pandemic pooches.

The kitchen island remains aspirational, clad in white marble, glowing like an abstract sculpture. Behind it, a bank of larder doors in dark green or blue, reflects a trend for nature. This hides a kitchen counter, under which are deep drawers, aiding accessibility. The doors conceal built-in appliances with wifi enabled 'smart' functions that can guide us through a recipe, and an 'appliance garage' for the ubiquitous air fryer. There is even a porcelain worktop with embedded convection hotspots, removing the need for a separate hob.

I can't help wondering what my Nanny Nora would have made of all this. She would have approved of everything being hidden away, and she would have been an enthusiastic adopter of the air fryer to reheat things. But I can't see her being enamoured of the performative kitchen island, having told the staff in her care home – quite proudly – that she had never, ever baked a cake. **H**

.....
Deborah Sugg Ryan is professor of design history and theory at the University of Portsmouth. She is writer and presenter, with Ruby Tandoh, of the Archive on 4 history of the fitted kitchen, *Fitted and Kitted*, which is available on BBC Sounds



For more content on all things kitchen and recipe-related, go to the website of our sister publication **Good Food**: goodfood.com

The m Olymp



Madcap Olympics

Competing ideas

Athletes at the first Paris Olympics competed in 19 sports including fencing, tennis, archery, athletics and croquet

As Paris prepares to stage the Summer Olympics, **David Goldblatt** describes how the 1900 Games – the first held in the French capital – almost defeated the Olympic ideal before it was even out of the starting blocks



"To treat these events as world's championships would be really an insult to the important events they are supposed to be. They are treated by most of the competitors as A HUGE JOKE." That was the verdict of

Australian sprinter Stanley Rowley on the Paris Olympics of 1900 – and he'd just won four medals.

This summer, the world's finest athletes will converge on the French capital once again for the latest edition of the sporting behemoth that is the Summer Olympics. In many ways, the competition will be returning home: the French capital may not have hosted the first modern Games, but it was unquestionably its birthplace. And, as Rowley's words reveal all too clearly, that birth was a painful one.

In 1892, Pierre, Baron De Coubertin – then a little-known French sports administrator – organised a symposium at the city's Sorbonne University, where he called for the revival of the ancient Greek Olympic Games in modern form. Two years and a lot of hustling later, De Coubertin held a full-blown conference, again in Paris, at which leading figures in the world of gentlemanly amateur sports gathered. It was here that they agreed to create an International Olympic Committee (IOC) and stage the first modern games, to be held in Athens in 1896.

Just 241 athletes made it to the Greek capital, competing in only nine sports. But that those Games happened at all after a hiatus of 1,500 years was remarkable. De Coubertin had rather higher hopes for the second edition of the modern Olympics, to



Pierre, Baron de Coubertin, photographed in c1925. Despite having spearheaded the movement to revive the Olympics, he was largely sidelined by organisers of the 1900 event

The 1900 Games had no opening ceremony, laurels, medals or mention in the Exposition programme

take place in 1900, when the host city would be the French capital.

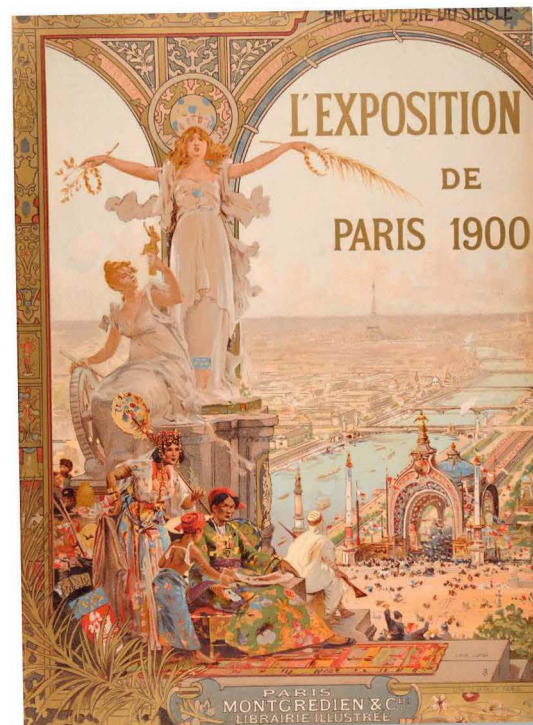
De Coubertin had long envisaged that the Paris Games would serve as the triumphant sporting component of the Exposition Universelle – the greatest of the world's fairs of the belle époque – held that year in the city. What transpired instead was a shambolic melange of spats, misunderstandings, false starts and apathy that almost crushed the Olympic ideal before it had got out of the starting blocks.

In an early draft of plans for an 'Athletic Exposition', the baron had proposed staging the Paris Games "in an enclosure exactly reproducing the Altis at Olympia, in so far as the excavations and discoveries made up to that point had made it possible to recreate it". He also suggested a programme of events similar to that of the 1896 Athens Olympics as the sporting component of the fair.

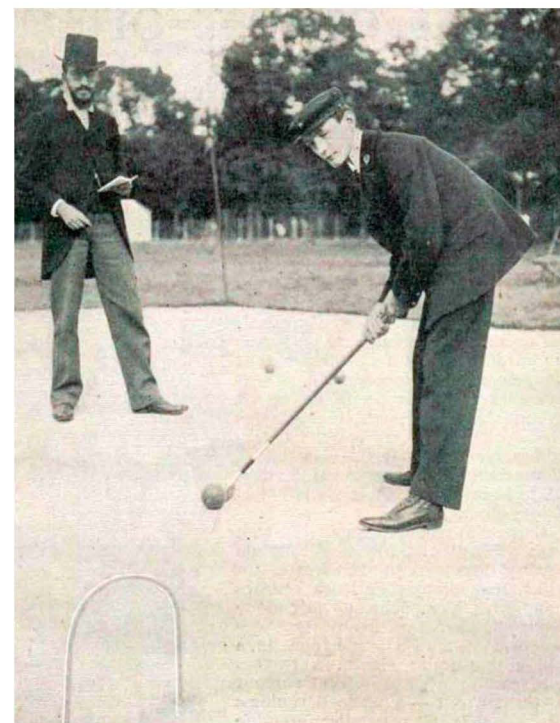
Alfred Picard, the civil servant in charge of the Exposition Universelle, thought differently. He considered the pagan neo-Hellenism of De Coubertin's proposals to be an "absurd anachronism", and that those games – exclusively for amateur gentlemen athletes – would be "cheap and unfit to represent the nation".

The Olympics that wasn't

Instead, the Exposition decided to put on its own sporting festival, the *Concours Internationaux d'Exercices Physiques et des Sports* (International Competition of Physical Exercises and Sports). This featured national schools sports championships, popular pastimes such as angling and pigeon racing, new crazes including motorboat and motorbike racing, and professional events (with prize money) in shooting and cycling. That's not to mention mass gymnastic and archery displays, plus firefighting and life-saving contests. De Coubertin would be permitted to stage a few amateur events around the city as a sideshow, but nothing more.



The vast Exposition Universelle that dominated Paris in 1900 was the fifth such world's fair held in the capital, and totally overshadowed the Games held during its seven-month tenure



Hoop dreams

France came away with all of the medals across three croquet events – perhaps because only French players competed, watched by just one paying spectator

Making a splash

Australian swimmer Frederick Lane emerges from the Seine after triumphing in the 200 metres freestyle. Just 45 minutes later he won the now-discontinued obstacle event



Undaunted, the baron continued to lobby his French political contacts to intervene, and tried to manoeuvre himself into a position of authority over at least some of the *Concours*' events. But he was blocked at every turn.

In fact, he had been so marginalised by the organisers that, during the summer of 1900, he and other members of the IOC were reduced to running or cycling between events that others had organised, trying to determine which ones could plausibly be considered 'Olympic'.

The Parisian public were not enthusiastic. Crowds were thin everywhere; at the croquet competition, according to the official report, "Spectators were not at all numerous; although I must mention an English lover of the game who made the journey from Nice to

Paris... unless I am very much mistaken, however, this gentleman was the only paying spectator." The press was just confused, referring to these occasions as the "festival games", "international games" and "the Olympian festival".

To all intents and purposes, as far as the world was aware, there was no 1900 Olympics Games. Or, rather, there was something approximating the Games, but without an opening ceremony, laurels or any mention in the official Exposition programme, and few medals (though these were awarded retrospectively several years later).

The final sporting schedule did, though – and contrary to De Coubertin's preferences – feature women. His stated position was that "an Olympiad with females would be

impractical, uninteresting, unaesthetic and improper". Having lost control of the agenda of Paris 1900, however, De Coubertin and the IOC were not able to exclude women from the games as they had done, in effect, at Athens in 1896, where all 241 participants had been men.

Of 997 athletes in Paris, 22 were women, competing in golf, tennis, equestrianism, croquet and sailing – albeit some by unlikely routes. In 1899, like many wealthy Americans of the era, Mary Abbott and her daughter Margaret, then living in Chicago, set sail for Paris. There, Mary, a novelist and journalist, would write, Margaret would study art, and both would attend the Exposition.

Olympic competition was not part of their plans. However, both were keen golfers –

Paris 1900 Olympics

Margaret had been recognised in the Chicago press for winning local competitions and possessing a “classy backswing” – so when they saw the competition announced in 1900 both signed up. Margaret shot a 47 and won the nine-hole tournament, receiving a large porcelain bowl, while Mary carded 65 to finish seventh. They were the first mother-daughter duo to compete in an Olympic event.

Ad hoc at best

Briton Charlotte Cooper, who had already won three times at Wimbledon, took first place in the women’s singles tennis event. At least two Frenchwomen competed in croquet, and Italian Elvira Guerra and Frenchwomen Jane Moulin and Blanche de Marcigny took part in the hacks and hunter equestrian competition, a mix of simple dressage manoeuvres and low jumps.

The team sport competitions were ad hoc at best. The cricket event, originally slated to be contested by teams representing Belgium, the Netherlands, France and Great Britain, was reduced to a single match after those first two teams withdrew. In effect, it proved to be a match between Britons – the Great British team being the touring Devon and Somerset Wanderers, and the French team largely comprising British expats living in Paris. Players were awarded miniature statues of the Eiffel Tower for their troubles.



Net gain Briton Charlotte Cooper, who’d won Wimbledon three times before the 1900 Games, triumphed in the women’s singles. She was the first woman to win an individual Olympic gold, and also won the mixed doubles



Crowded field

Marathon runners vie for road space with cyclists – one Canadian athlete even protested that he’d been run over by a bike

WACKY RACES

Five more Olympic events that encapsulate the chaos of Paris 1900

TUG OF WAR

American pulling power

The Paris edition of the *New York Herald* was outspoken, to say the least, in its criticism of the organisation of the tug of war competition in the 1900 Olympics, citing it as “an object lesson in how not to do a thing”.

The event should have been a contest between Racing Club de France and a US team. However, three of the Americans were also hammer throwers and, with their event clashing with the tug of war, the team withdrew. At the last minute, a Scandinavian team comprising Danes and Swedes was assembled, beating the French in a best-of-three competition.

The US press, however, considered their team the winners after the Americans beat the Scandinavians in an unofficial contest a few days later. The French press reported that the American victory was questionable: a group of their supporters came onto the field and joined the team, ensuring victory.

SWIMMING

The fast Lane

This summer, we won’t see aquatic obstacle racing or competitive underwater swimming – both of which featured at the 1900 Games. In the former, competitors had to climb over a wooden obstacle, then swim to a line of rowing boats into which they had to clamber then dive off, before swimming under a second row of boats. The race was won by Australian Frederick Lane, who received a large bronze statue of a horse.

The subaquatic athletes were awarded points according to how long they stayed underwater, and how far they travelled. Frenchman Charles Devendeville won gold by staying under for one minute and eight seconds after reaching the maximum distance of 60 metres.

JUMPS

The human frog

The extraordinary American athlete Ray Ewry (right) won three gold medals in a single day, competing in the now-discontinued standing jump events. Eschewing a run up, and with their feet placed firmly on the ground, competitors took on the high jump, long jump and triple jump.

Ewry, dubbed ‘the human frog’, soared an amazing 1.65 metres in the high jump and 3.30 metres in the long jump. His achievements seem even more astonishing when you consider that in childhood Ewry used a wheelchair after a bout of polio, before rebuilding his strength and mobility through athletics. He won seven more gold medals: at St Louis in 1904, the Intercalated Olympic Games in Athens in 1906, and London in 1908.



ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES/TOPFOTO



What happened at the first modern Olympics?

Nige Tassell explores the events and background to the pioneering games staged at Athens in 1896: historyextra.com/1896-olympics



Players in the cricket final were awarded miniature statues of the Eiffel Tower for their troubles

Football was a three-way affair between English amateurs Upton Park, Club Français and a bunch of Belgians – university students and players from various clubs – though there was not enough time for them to all play each other. Moseley Wanderers, the English entrants in a similarly tiny rugby competition, arrived, played and left on the same day without even being aware that they were competing in the Olympics. Gold went to France, whose centre, the Haitian-French medical student Constantin Henriquez, was the first black athlete to compete at the Olympic Games, and the first to win a gold medal.

Team composition was even more laid-back for the polo event: four of the teams mixed Irish, British, Mexican, American and French players, and players were even permitted to compete for more than one team.

Marathon mayhem

The organisation of the marathon was emblematic of the overall chaos that characterised the Games. The event was poorly signed and virtually unmarshalled, and runners had to compete for space with the bikes, coaches and trams that thronged the streets of Paris.

When the hot favourite, American Arthur Newton, crossed the finishing line he believed that he'd won the race. It soon transpired, though, that a Swede and three French athletes



A high-flying competitor in the ballooning events at the 1900 Paris Games poses for the camera while preparing for lift-off

BALLOONING

Flying into trouble

Considered at the time to be an Olympic discipline, and certainly the province of amateurs, the 1900 ballooning competitions (or exhibitions) proved an epic affair. Participants beneath gas-filled balloons set off from Le Parc d'aerostation in Paris, attempting to fly as far as possible, for as long as possible or as high as possible.

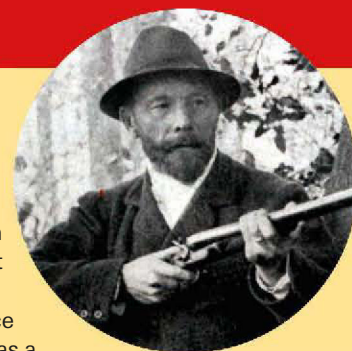
In the long-distance event, second-placed Jacques Balsan made it to a spot south of Warsaw in what's now Poland. But the winner was the French aeronautical pioneer Henry de la Vaulx who, flying with Georges Castillon de Saint-Victor, flew around 1,200 miles to land near Kiev (now Kyiv), at the time in tsarist Russia, in nearly 36 hours. On landing he was taken into police custody, having failed to file a passport request with the Russian government.

PIGEONS

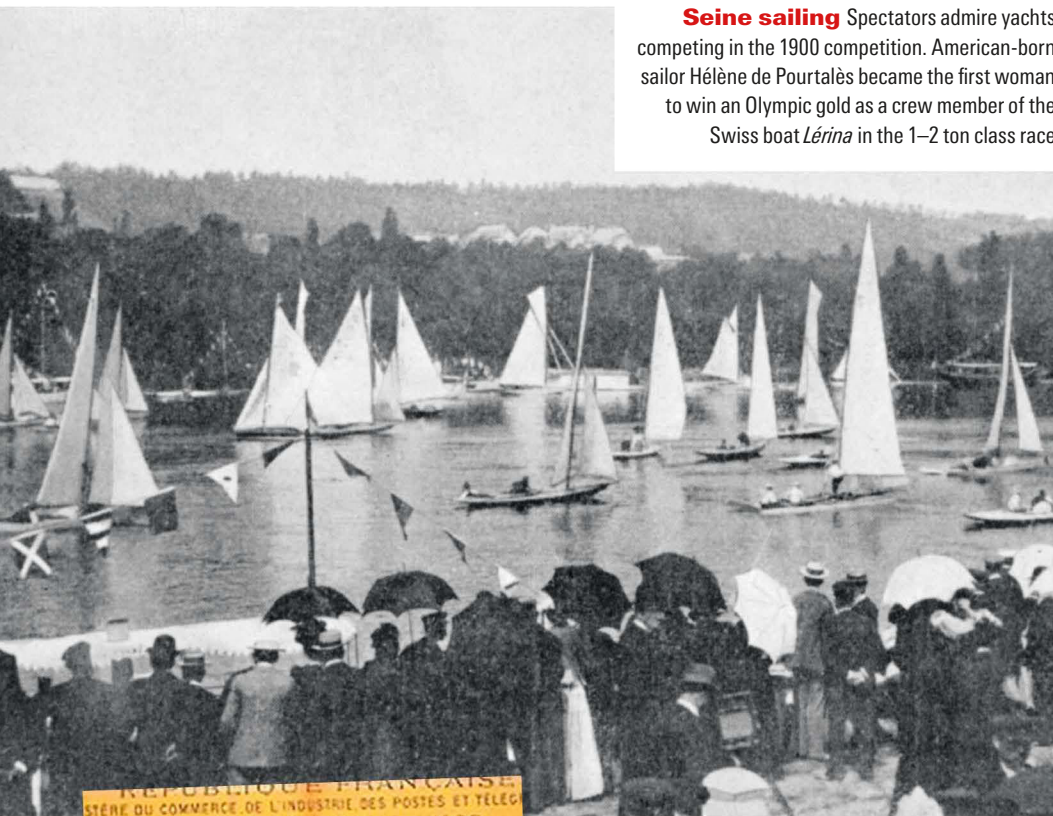
...dead and alive

Pigeons featured in the competitions at the Exposition Universelle not once but twice. There was a huge and popular pigeon-racing competition for the bird lovers, and a live pigeon shooting contest for the hunters, won by Belgian Léon de Lunden (inset).

The IOC has, retrospectively, declined to classify pigeon shooting as an Olympic event – not, it seems, for ethical reasons, but because there was a very considerable cash prize for the contestants who could blast the most birds out of the sky, making it a professional sport. More than 300 pigeons met their ends during that event in the 1900 Olympics and, to the relief of animal welfare advocates, it was replaced at the 1904 Olympics by clay pigeon shooting.



Paris 1900 Olympics



Seine sailing Spectators admire yachts competing in the 1900 competition. American-born sailor Hélène de Pourtalès became the first woman to win an Olympic gold as a crew member of the Swiss boat *Lérina* in the 1–2 ton class race



Unlike many other sports at the Games, fencing was a truly international affair, featuring 260 competitors from 19 nations – though, despite the impression conveyed by this poster, none were women

American quadruple medallist Alvin Kraenzlein was also noted for his Eton collar, silk cravat and rakish cap

had finished ahead of him – despite the fact he said no other athlete had overtaken him. Rumours circulated that the winner, named Michel Théato, was a local baker's delivery boy who had used his knowledge of the city's backstreets to gain an unfair advantage.

Ion Pool, a British competitor, certainly had his doubts. "The marathon turned out to be a dismal fiasco," he later recalled. "The whole conduct of the race... and the entire absence of precautions to ensure fair play can only be characterised by the one word: Preposterous – with a capital P." Dick Grant, a Canadian who finished sixth, even mounted a legal case against the IOC, claiming that at a crucial point in the race he had been run over by a cyclist.

The pole vault proved equally contentious. Initially scheduled for a Sunday, the presence of many devout Christian US competitors who wouldn't compete on the sabbath persuaded organisers to reschedule the event for Monday. However, the decision was then taken to shift the event back to Sunday – without telling those sabbatarians. So it was held without them, and was won by another American, Irving Baxter.

Unsurprisingly, the irate churchgoers protested, and further pole vault competitions were staged on the Monday and Thursday,

won by two of those sabbatarians, Bascom Johnson and Dan Horton. The controversy didn't end there, however; officials refused to recognise these later events, and confirmed Baxter as champion. They did, though, offer Horton a compensation prize – an umbrella.

The coxed four rowing competition also encountered problems. Three semi-finals were held, with the winners and one runner-up going through to compete in the final. However, two teams eliminated in the second and third semi-finals recorded faster times than the winner of the first semi-final – unsurprisingly, again, they protested vociferously. The organisers then planned to stage a final with six boats – but, because the course was designed for just four, this was clearly impossible. The compromise decision was to stage two finals, each with just three boats – with the result that all six competing teams won medals of one colour or another.

Publicity gold

The IOC did, though, enjoy one PR triumph and showcase one real star at these games: the American Alvin Kraenzlein. He won four gold medals, in the 60-metre sprint, the 110-metre and 200-metre hurdles, and the long jump. Kraenzlein pioneered the modern technique for hurdling, leading with one leg





Pioneering player Haitian-French student Constantin Henriquez (centre) – a member of the Union des Sociétés Françaises de Sports Athlétiques rugby team that won gold in 1900 – was the first black athlete to compete at a modern Olympics



Levelling the playing field

Women prepare to putt during the golf event – one of only five sports in which female players took part. In all, just 22 women competed in tennis, sailing, croquet, golf and equestrianism



American athlete Alvin Kraenzlein pioneered the now-universal modern technique for hurdling – and claimed four golds

lifted over the hurdles before the other, instead of using the existing mode of leaping with both legs tucked under the body. He was also noted for his dress sense: in Paris he wore an Eton collar, a silk cravat and a rakish cap.

Over the following decades, the IOC never fully resolved which of the events that had taken place over the summer of 1900 should be considered Olympic; nor did it establish consistent criteria for making this decision. In his 1998 book on Paris 1900, Bill Mallon – a leading authority on the history of the Games – suggested that for an event to be considered Olympic, it had to be fully amateur, with international participation, and open to all without handicapping. Only after Mallon's pronouncement was a final medal table for the 1900 Games compiled.

Things were marginally better four years later. The 1904 Games were held, much to De Coubertin's irritation, in St Louis, Missouri as a small athletic appendage to the giant World's Fair, the Louisiana Purchase Exposition. De Coubertin had planned for the games to be staged in Chicago, hosted by his blue-blooded friends at the university there, but the organisers of the exposition refused to countenance a competing event being staged in the US in the same year.

(In 1906, though, the Greek royal family collaborated with a few renegade members of the IOC to hold an alternative Olympic Games in Athens.)

De Coubertin refused to attend these events in St Louis and Athens, and focused instead on the fourth modern Games, staged in London in 1908. Now firmly under his control, and graced by the British royal family, this edition was much more to the baron's liking. However, it was, like earlier iterations, subsumed into another spectacle – the popular Franco-British Exhibition at what is now White City in London. It wasn't until 1912, and the fifth Games in Stockholm, that the Olympics stood alone as a spectacle, and its ascent to global sporting domination could begin.

Not surprisingly, De Coubertin later looked back on the chaos of 1900, and remarked: "It's a miracle the Olympic movement survived these Games." **H**

.....
David Goldblatt is a sports writer, broadcaster and journalist. His books include *The Games: A Global History of the Olympics* (Macmillan, 2016)



You can watch, hear and read comprehensive Olympics coverage across BBC TV, radio and online: bbc.co.uk



FIVE THINGS YOU (PROBABLY) DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT... late medieval England

Hannah Skoda, who is teaching our new HistoryExtra Academy course, shares five surprising facts about life in the 14th and 15th centuries

1 People were appalled by violence

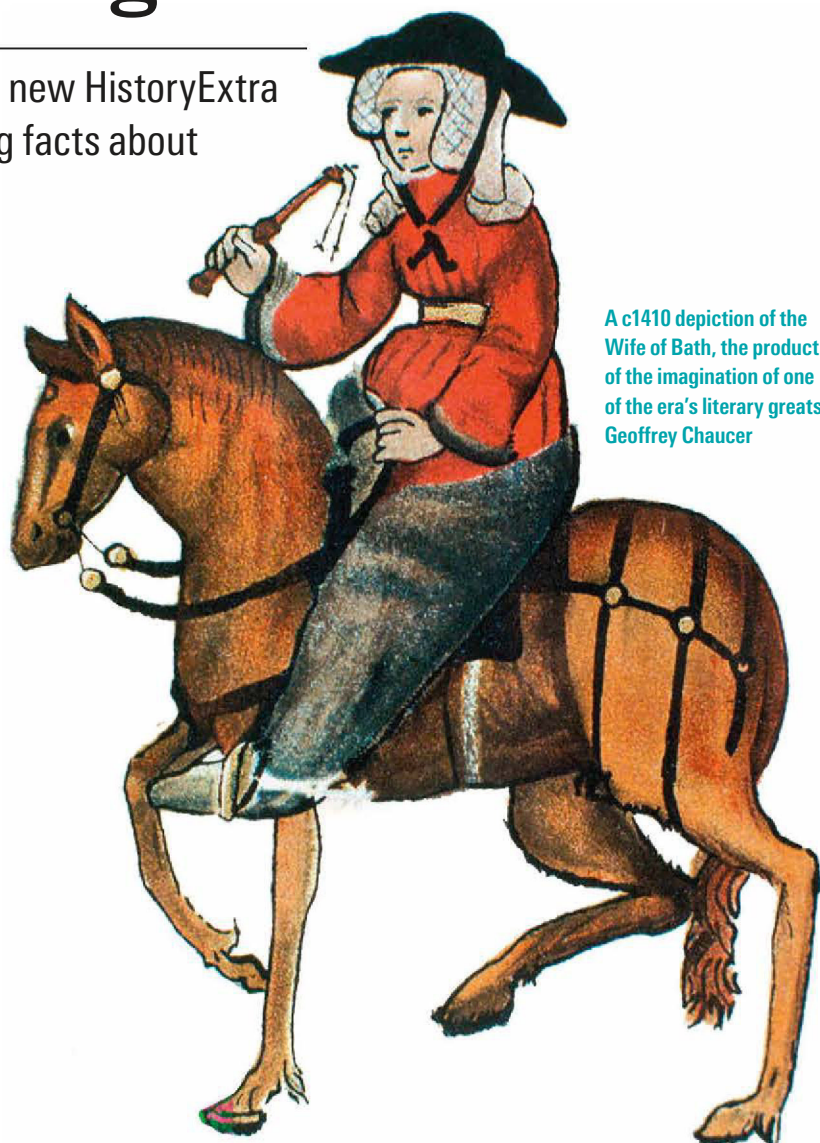
England in the late Middle Ages was a dangerous place. Violence was rife – both at an interpersonal level, and as enacted in legal punishments. A newly produced medieval murder map (medievalmurdermap.co.uk) points to terrifying levels of brutality.

Nevertheless, there is plenty of evidence to show that people were distressed and concerned about violence. They didn't merely accept it with a shrug of the shoulders. When Sir Thomas Courtenay and his henchmen murdered the Devon lawyer Nicholas Radford in 1455, there was widespread horror. Contemporary accounts described the act as "heinous" and lacking "compassion or pity".

Legal authorities were dependent on the cooperation of local communities to bring accused people to justice, and in many cases actually avoided violent punishment – deciding, for example, that someone had already suffered enough while awaiting trial in prison. Notably, judicial torture was avoided in medieval England.



Men fight with axes, as shown in a 13th-century manuscript. Violence was rife – and widely feared



A c1410 depiction of the Wife of Bath, the product of the imagination of one of the era's literary greats: Geoffrey Chaucer

2 They knew how to have a good time

Life was extraordinarily tough in late medieval England, with many people living at, or below, the subsistence level. The 14th century saw a series of cataclysms, with a wave of cold, wet winters exacerbating harvest failures and livestock disease, and causing famine. In 1348, bubonic plague arrived, killing up to 60 per cent of the population and becoming endemic.

Yet communities were extremely resilient. Imaginative literature blossomed: this is the period of the so-called alliterative revival, referring to a rich form of poetry that flourished

in the second half of the 14th century. It's the period of Geoffrey Chaucer, William Langland, John Gower and so many other literary greats.

The visual arts were vibrant: painting, sculpture, architecture and textile work were exuberant and exquisite. And much of the material can be described as really good fun. Take, for example, the stories of Robin Hood, which were popular in this period. These may have voiced subversive critiques of the corruption of the law, but they also provoked laughter and merriment.



A 15th-century depiction of King Richard II meeting rebels during the peasants' revolt, an extraordinary example of ordinary people expressing their political grievances



5 They pushed the boundaries of religious experience

This was an era of dogmatism, with religious deviance harshly persecuted. And yet there was space for profoundly personal approaches to spirituality. Margery Kempe was an early 15th-century woman whose passionate spiritual experiences pushed the boundaries of what it was to encounter Christ. This was also an era when many people used Books of Hours to guide their prayer outside a liturgical context. Individuals were at once part of communities defined by shared belief, and absorbed in their own personal spiritual lives.

And religion was not just imposed top-down: some of the most popular saints were chosen locally. The cult of John Schorne in North Marston, famous for popping a devil into a boot (perhaps a misreading of his apparent miraculous cure for gout – a devilish pain in the foot), never gained papal approval. However, it was so popular that it drew pilgrims from far and wide, and the sought-after relics were eventually moved to Windsor Great Chapel. **H**



A 15th-century painting shows the local saint John Schorne conjuring the devil into a boot

Hannah Skoda is tutorial fellow in history at St John's College, Oxford. Her books include *Medieval Violence: Physical Brutality in Northern France, 1270–1330* (OUP, 2013)

3 They were politically engaged

Medieval societies were certainly exploitative and oppressive. But we should not assume that those at the lowest rungs of society remained silent.

This was a period of dramatic revolts, in which a wide range of people took their grievances to the highest level. The peasants' revolt of 1381 is an extraordinary moment. It is marked by the fiery preaching of the priest John Ball who, as the revolt was

gathering momentum, exhorted his fellow rebels to "consider that now the time is come, appointed to us by God, in which ye may (if ye will) cast off the yoke of bondage, and recover liberty".

Alongside outright rebellion came a vast increase in the number of petitions brought by communities and individuals across the land to the highest levels of government. The entire political community had found its voice.

4 Their family values were surprisingly modern

Medieval people cherished their families, and mass mortality did not make loss any less painful. There is a wealth of evidence pointing to the love parents bore their children: numerous miracle stories tell of parental devastation at the death or illness of a child, and communal rejoicing at a miraculous cure. Families lived lives with just as much emotional texture as we do today.

Medieval marriage was certainly profoundly patriarchal, but women did not just put up with oppression. We have evidence that some unhappily married women brought a peck of oats to the saint Wilgefortis in the hope that she would relieve them of their husbands. Yet many women



A window at Canterbury Cathedral tells the story of the miraculous recovery of a young boy, Bobby of Rochester

were lucky enough to experience relationships of mutual respect, even at the highest level. The marriage of John Duke of Bedford and Anne of Burgundy in 1423 was marked by affection and friendship. When she lay dying, Bedford's grief was loud and public.

BBC HiSTORY MAGAZINE

**Save when you subscribe
to the digital edition**



Enjoy our Premium App experience now available from



zinio™



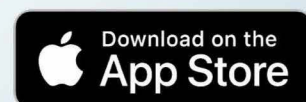
BBC History Magazine is Britain's bestselling history magazine. We feature leading historians writing lively and thought-provoking new takes on the great events of the past.



Enjoy our Premium App experience now available from



zinio™



BBC **HiSTORY** MAGAZINE

The man, the myth, the murderer

As Scotland celebrates the 750th birthday of **ROBERT THE BRUCE**, the national hero lauded for his military exploits against the 'auld enemy', **Fiona Watson** reveals the shadowy side of a ruthless noble who schemed and slaughtered his way to the throne

Towering figure

King Robert I of Scotland is commemorated in this striking statue at Stirling Castle. Following his inauguration in 1306, Robert spent more than 20 years striving for full recognition of his country's independence

He's the beleaguered king on the run, finding courage and inspiration in the perseverance of a spider. The noble hero on his great horse, gazing across the field of his most famous victory. The inspiration for stirring rhetoric on freedom.

He's Robert the Bruce, celebrated in poetry and story, in song and on the silver screen. As Scotland celebrates the 750th anniversary of his birth, the great king shows no sign of losing his appeal as a national hero – a medieval David confronting the Goliath of England.

He was certainly remarkable. Indeed, I would argue that the myth cloaking the Bruce has denied him full recognition as a military leader of extraordinary vision and talent. But there's another side to this coin: cold, calculating ambition and utter ruthlessness, reflected in his flexible loyalty, his efforts to rewrite history – and his role in the murder of his greatest rival to the throne.

Competitive spirit

Robert Bruce was born on 11 July 1274, probably on one of his family's manors in Essex. Like many noble families in the British Isles, the Bruces were of Norman origin. The first Robert de Brus crossed the Channel around 1100, earning lands and offices in the service of Henry I of England and David I of Scotland. (Almost all Bruce heirs were named Robert, so it's helpful to give them numbers: the most famous, King Robert I 'the Bruce', was Robert 7.) Bruces became wealthy and prominent in both countries. However, it was the Scottish branch of the family, centred on the western border lordship of Annandale, that proved the most upwardly mobile.

Robert 5, known as 'the Competitor' – and grandfather of 'the' Bruce – was the first to pursue the Scottish crown. He had inherited a considerable property portfolio on both sides of the border, but nurtured higher ambitions bolstered by his royal lineage. He was the eldest son of Isabel of Huntingdon, great-granddaughter of David I of Scotland, and set his sights on the Scottish throne following the deaths of Alexander III in 1286 and that king's only direct heir, Margaret of Norway, in 1290.

In the ensuing succession crisis – including a brief civil war – the Bruces ultimately lost out to John Balliol, grandson of Isabel of Huntingdon's elder sister; no doubt they believed they'd been robbed. Certainly, John Balliol's reign (1292–96) was difficult for the Bruces. By the time war broke out between Scotland and England in 1296, the year after Robert 5 died, they'd lost all Scottish possessions. So Roberts 6 and 7 turned to England.

Robert the Bruce

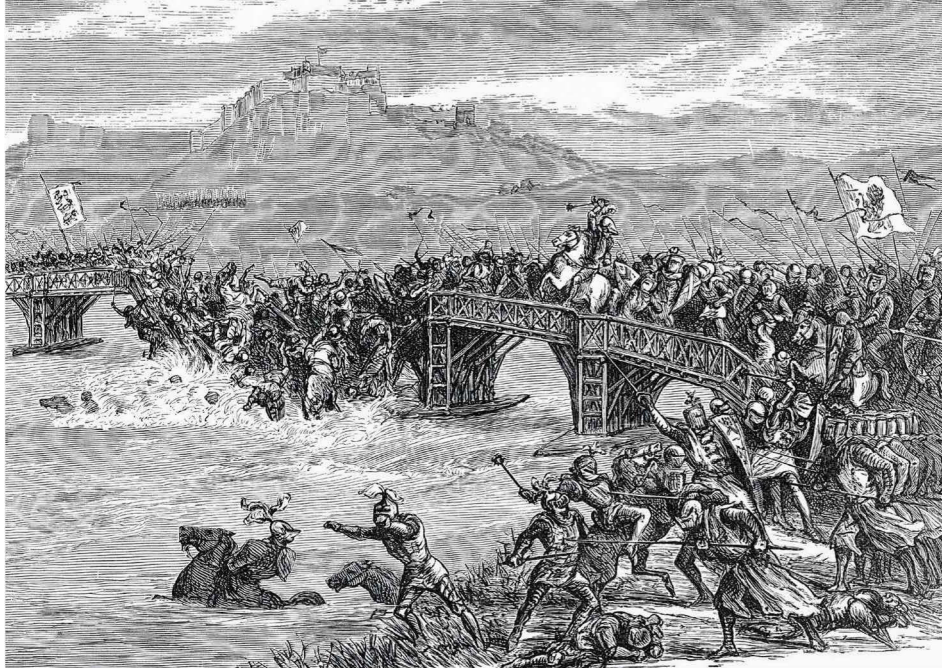
In spring 1296, both Roberts rode with the army brought north by Edward I to punish Balliol for daring to question English overlordship. King John was also – correctly – accused of seeking a closer relationship with England’s enemy, France. But once John had been stripped of his crown, Robert 6 – who had believed his loyalty to England would be rewarded with the Scottish throne – was gobsmacked to be told by Edward: “Have we nothing else to do than win kingdoms for you?”

Robert 6 remained loyal to Edward, but his son proved to be a chip off his grandfather’s block. By then in his early twenties, Robert 7 decided to take advantage of the political vacuum in Scotland created by the absence – in prison or in exile – of the politically powerful Comyn family. Robert gave a pretty speech to his father’s knights at Lochmaben, near Dumfries, claiming that his oath of allegiance to England had been coerced. “But since no one has ever hated his own flesh... I must go to my people and join my nation from which I was born... And I beseech you... to come with me.”

Though his father’s men refused to back him on this occasion, Robert 7 led an army on behalf of the Scottish political community, supposedly against unprecedented English financial demands. Despite the fact that he soon capitulated, he was still viewed with suspicion by the English government.

The young Robert was the least of Edward’s worries, though. Revolt was spreading, culminating in Scottish victory at Stirling Bridge in September 1297. A new government was set up, led by the victor, William Wallace, as guardian for the imprisoned King John. But in July 1298, Edward defeated Wallace in person, though Scotland as a whole did not capitulate.

Now Robert, recognising that Wallace’s political career was over, made his move; by the end of the year, he had become guardian – a remarkable political achievement.



Famous victory Scottish forces under William Wallace and Andrew Murray rout English troops at Stirling Bridge in 1297, as imagined in an engraving

He did not rule alone, however. The Comyns had been sent back to Scotland in 1297 to help stabilise Edward’s rule but, after Stirling Bridge, they rejoined the fight for Scottish independence, and John Comyn of Badenoch took power alongside Robert 7.

Comyn was a similar age to Bruce, and just as ambitious; naturally, they hated each other. But Robert’s political clout was no match for his fellow guardian’s, and he was soon forced out. By 1302, he had made his peace with Edward; Comyn, meanwhile, continued as guardian, leading the fight against English forces until 1304 when exhaustion and diplomatic isolation forced the Scots to make peace.

Eye on the throne

As the last castle fell to the English, Robert 7 received news of his father’s death. Immediately, his thoughts seem to have turned to the throne. Edward was clearly ill, and the Scots would not have to wait long for their oaths of loyalty to die with him.

But Robert now faced a problem. John Comyn had not only led the Scots for most

of the war; he was also Balliol’s closest relative in Scotland and, once Edward was dead, the man most likely to become king. He was Bruce’s bitter rival.

So Robert couldn’t afford to wait. The events of 10 February 1306 are so obscured by deliberate lies that we’ll never know exactly what happened. It seems that, thanks to their history of animosity, John Comyn would meet Bruce only on sacred ground – the Greyfriars monastery in Dumfries. Did they agree to meet in order to talk about the throne? If so, their conversation was short, because Comyn and his uncle seem to have been stabbed almost immediately. The later story – that Bruce didn’t know if he’d killed his rival – is propaganda designed to exculpate him from having landed the fatal blow.

This murder was not, as Hollywood would have it, something that had to be done for the greater good, and to a man whose grovelling acquiescence to English rule meant he pretty much deserved it. Rather, it was the cold-blooded removal of a rival with better credentials to lead Scotland than Bruce, in terms of blood, political support and

TIMELINE The rise, fall and rise of Robert Bruce

11 July 1274

Robert Bruce, the seventh of that name, is born – probably on his family’s property in Essex, or possibly at Turnberry Castle in Ayrshire.



1286–92

Following the **death of King Alexander III**, competition for the Scottish throne flares between Robert Bruce (grandfather of the later king) and John Balliol (pictured left), eventually being resolved in the latter’s favour.

Spring 1296

The seventh Robert Bruce takes part in the conquest of Scotland launched by Edward I of England. Two years later, he is **named guardian of Scotland** but is forced out by his co-guardian, John Comyn of Badenoch.

10 February 1306

Robert kills John Comyn at the Greyfriars monastery in Dumfries, and seizes the throne of Scotland. He is inaugurated in Scone six weeks later.



Robert the Bruce murders John Comyn, as imagined in a 1902 book illustration

23–24 June 1314

Robert wins a spectacular victory at the site now known as Bannockburn, just south of Stirling, using the terrain and expert tactics to defeat the much larger English army of Edward II.



The Bruce's "glorious struggle for freedom"

Read Fiona Watson's article exploring the background to the battle of Bannockburn, and its legacy, at historyextra.com/battle-bannockburn



experience. John Comyn's killing came to cast a long shadow over Robert's reign when he did eventually take the throne.

As the man behind the murder, Bruce knew that only the ailing Edward could save him from the Comyns' vengeance. Seemingly, he offered to accept the English king's overlordship in return for the throne. The response was a stunned silence, prompting Robert to declare to the English government that he would "defend himself with the longest stick he had".

He was enthroned at Scone on 25 March 1306. As Robert Bruce, he was a dead man; as King Robert I of Scotland, he might gather support from those Scots who were not close to the Comyns.

Once king, though, Robert made such basic tactical errors that he soon ended up on the run. Many close supporters, including three of his brothers, were executed by an incandescent Edward I, and his wife and daughter were imprisoned. As the year ebbed, he fled to far north-west Scotland with only a few companions, lucky to be alive. As a result he was dubbed 'King Hobbe' – an outlaw who rode not a noble warhorse but a little 'hobby'.

It was at this point he truly proved his mettle. Spider or not, these undocumented months proved miraculous. While his men languished in the depths of despair, Bruce cheered them by recounting the tale of "worthy Fierabras", a 'Saracen' who faced similar challenges but survived to become one of Charlemagne's knights. The new king was clearly loved: reunions with friends who thought him dead brought forth "tears of joy".

Student of warfare

Most importantly, Robert knuckled down to study warfare – notably the victory of the spear-wielding Flemings over the French cavalry in the so-called battle of the Golden Spurs at Courtrai (Kortrijk) in 1302. He surely discussed guerrilla tactics with his Hebridean hosts, too.

Bruce returned to the fray as a warrior king – albeit one who preferred the heather to a castle hearth. His tactics were flexibility and surprise. He might burn fortresses, ambush English forces in tree-covered valleys (at Glen Trool in April 1307), or even fight on an open field, so long as proper precautions were taken to neutralise a cavalry charge, as at Loudoun Hill in May 1307. Even before Edward I's death in July 1307, Robert's successes prompted many Scots to take a chance on him.

The new English king, Edward II, had to contend with an empty treasury as well as a nature vulnerable to domineering men who caused political problems. No English army crossed the northern border for another three years, leaving Robert free to deal with the civil war he had unleashed.

While his brother, Edward, took on Balliol's lordship of Galloway in the south-west, King Robert headed into Comyn territory in the north-east. Winter did not deter them, nor mountains, nor long marches. John Comyn had used similar tactics, but Robert made them into an art form. When severe illness sparked rumours of his demise, Bruce's presence on the battlefield – propped up on a litter – was enough to prompt his enemies to flee.

By the end of 1308, the Comyns and their supporters had been forced out of Scotland and the earldom of Buchan had been set

ablaze, its inhabitants brutally slaughtered in their homes.

Edward II's presence in Scotland in 1310–11 helped rally anti-Bruce forces – but he could not stay forever. For the moment, Robert preferred to avoid English armies. He launched raids into northern England as a prelude to extracting money in exchange for guarantees not to do it again. He wanted peace, but only if Edward acknowledged Scottish independence and Bruce's right to rule – which the English king would never do.

More castles fell to Bruce and his audacious commanders by siege, surprise or ruse, and were destroyed. By October 1313, Robert felt strong enough to declare that all Scottish landowners who had not yet accepted him as king had one year to do so or risk forfeiture.

Pivotal showdown

The gauntlet had been thrown down.

Edward II duly picked it up, finally putting together a financial package to pay for another army. But Robert laid his plans for a decisive face-off – including determining the location of the clash to his own advantage.

Stirling Castle – the last English stronghold – was besieged by Scottish forces, and its commander agreed to yield if not relieved by Edward II's army by midsummer 1314. When the English forces arrived to battle Robert's less numerous troops, the Bruce used the discipline he'd instilled in his men, along with his tactical nous, to win a stunning victory at Bannockburn.

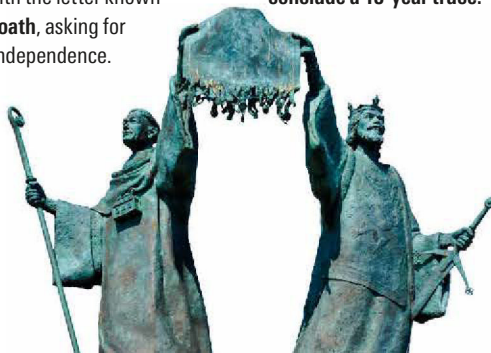
This triumph came in large part through his drilling, over previous weeks, of moveable schiltroms (Scottish spear formations), and his command over an army ordered to take no prisoners or booty until the battle was won. But he did not neglect to inspire his men, either. "You could have lived in serfdom," he told them the night before his victory. "But because you yearned to have freedom, you are gathered here with me." In contrast with Robert, Edward was

Comyn's murder was the cold-blooded removal of a rival with better credentials to lead Scotland than Bruce

1319

Irrked by Robert's continued conflict with England, the pope excommunicates Scotland. The next year, Scottish nobles respond with the letter known as the **Declaration of Arbroath**, asking for recognition of Scotland's independence.

King Robert (right) holds aloft the Declaration of Arbroath in a modern monument in that town



1323

After years of fighting, Scotland and England conclude a 13-year truce.

5 March 1324

The king's second wife, Elizabeth de Burgh, gives birth to his only legitimate surviving son, David. In the same year, the pope finally recognises Robert (whose statue is pictured, right) as the king of independent Scotland.

17 March 1328

Robert signs the **treaty ending the war with England**, which is countersigned by Edward III on 1 May, **acknowledging the independence of Scotland**.

7 June 1329

Robert Bruce dies in his house in Cardross, near Dumbarton Castle, and is succeeded by his son, David II.





Defining clash Scottish and English forces meet at the battle of Bannockburn in 1314, as depicted in the Holkham Bible (c1327–35). The hard-drilled discipline of Bruce's spearmen won the day

cocksure but clueless. Yet Bannockburn did not win Robert peace. True, his womenfolk were returned (following their capture by the English in 1306), and many former enemies accepted Bruce as their lord. But even though the raids on northern England continued, and Edward Bruce opened another front in Ireland in 1315, still the English king wouldn't budge.

Pressure was applied on Robert from abroad, too. Pope John XXII wanted another crusade, which would require the warriors of western Europe to make peace with each other. Bruce, though, defiantly continued his military action, prompting the irate pope to excommunicate the entire nation.

A letter written in Latin and sent by Scottish barons to the papal court in Avignon in 1320 was Scotland's impassioned response. Known now as the Declaration of Arbroath, it contained lines immortalised in translation on a thousand T-shirts: "As long as a hundred of us remain alive, we will never in any degree be subject to the dominion of the English. It is not for glory, honours or riches that we fight, but for liberty alone, which no good man loses but with his life."

When Edward Bruce died in Ireland in 1318, his brother was finally persuaded that force wasn't working, and that he needed friends abroad. By 1323, the warring kings agreed a 13-year truce, binding should either of them die. Since Bruce was older, this was surely meant to buy time for his heir – initially his grandson, Robert Stewart (born in 1316 to his daughter, Marjorie) – to come of age. But in January 1327, Edward II was forced to abdicate; he died eight months later. Breaching the truce, King Robert launched an attack on England. Edward III's regency government decided they needed to make peace. Despite the fury of the young English king, a treaty was concluded in spring 1328.

Arduous life

Robert the Bruce was by then more than 50 years old. His life had been arduous, and it's a miracle he had survived so long. Retiring to his new manor at Cardross, he lingered until June 1329; he was succeeded by his son, born in 1324, who ruled as David II.

But even death didn't end Robert's endeavours. His great commander and friend James Douglas had promised to take his king's heart on one final journey, to fulfil Robert's crusading vow (see the box, right). Though it never reached the Holy Land, the Bruce's heart did travel farther in death than he did in life.

What should we make of this remarkable life? It's a pity that Hollywood seems unwilling to recount the real story of a man more

Robert the Bruce's single-mindedness and devastating military acumen paved the way for survival and success

ambitious than Shakespeare's Macbeth – a king who achieved the seemingly impossible, dying in his bed at what was, considering the times and his many travails, the ripe old age of 54.

Robert Bruce was a cold-blooded murderer. The savage example he made of Buchan, slaying its inhabitants, was remembered for generations. It could be argued that brutal times demand brutal men, and that Scotland's predicament left little room for compassion and compromise – though Bruce, like Edward I, could be statesmanlike when necessary. Yet a much harsher judgment has been passed on Bruce's enemies. The Comyns had every reason to fight against him, but their reputations – not least as leaders of Scottish resistance to Edward I – have been trashed by Robert's propagandists and subsequent historians.

History was also rewritten in official documents to the French king and the pope to exaggerate the legitimacy of Robert's claim to the throne, and to denigrate the rights and character of his predecessor, John Balliol. This process reached its apogee with Archdeacon John Barbour's romance poem *The Bruce*, written in the 1370s during the reign of that first King Robert's grandson, Robert II. This partisan version of events became a cornerstone of Scotland's story, incorporated into subsequent chronicles and accepted without much question until relatively recently – yet another example of the victor writing history.

Yet Robert Bruce turned out to be exactly what Scotland needed in 1306. He was extraordinary, his single-mindedness and devastating military acumen paving the way for incredible survival and success. And he was loved, his charisma echoing down the centuries in stories of his ability to inspire, even in the most difficult of circumstances. Seen from a safe distance of 700 years, I would not wish him any other way. **H**

.....
Fiona Watson is a historian and author whose books include *Robert the Bruce* (The History Press, 2014)

THE FINAL JOURNEY OF THE BRUCE'S HEART

How part of the Bruce was carried to Spain and back

Robert the Bruce's grandfather had gone on crusade with Prince Edward of England in 1270, and the king's desire to go himself seems entirely genuine. But by the time he signed a treaty ending the war with the English in 1328, he was too sick. He had a plan, though. After Robert's burial, "The good lord [Sir James] Douglas then had a case of fine silver made, cunningly enamelled; he [put] the king's heart in it [despite papal edicts against evisceration] and wore it always round his neck."

Douglas, long Robert's trusted commander, travelled by boat – in great style, with an entourage of nearly 30 – to Seville to help Alfonso XI of Castile in his war against the Muslim ruler of Granada, seeing it as a staging post en route to the Holy Land. At the end of August 1330, Alfonso's army moved to Teba, 85 miles west of Granada, where they prepared for battle. However, the day before the clash, Douglas was killed – along with several other Scots – either because he attacked the Muslims precipitately (which is entirely believable) or while trying to save one of his men. Realising he'd been surrounded and wouldn't survive, Sir James reputedly took off the casket containing Robert's heart and hurled it ahead of him, shouting "A Douglas! A Douglas!"

Whatever the truth of the matter, the Scots blamed Alfonso for the death of their great general. He was brought home to Scotland, along with Bruce's heart, which was reputedly laid to rest in its casket in Melrose Abbey. Sir James was buried in his family's mausoleum in St Bride's Church, Douglas.



A memorial marks the spot in Melrose Abbey where the reputed heart of Robert the Bruce, buried here c1330, was reinterred in 1998

Elżbieta Zawacka, AKA Zo

The Polish powerhouse

Smuggling papers, microfilms and cash across Nazi-occupied Europe, dodging the Gestapo, training with the SOE, parachuting back into Poland... nothing was too dangerous for this fearless female figurehead of the Polish resistance. **CLARE MULLEY** tells her story

Leaving her coat on her seat, Elżbieta Zawacka – AKA Zo – shuffled out of her train compartment and along the dark corridor. Despite the blackout, glancing over her shoulder she saw a man's pale face lean out to watch her. She had boarded the train knowing that the Gestapo had been following her. Now it was clear they were still on her tail. "Shit," she thought, pressing on.

It was May 1942. Two days earlier, Zo had been smuggling military intelligence from Nazi-occupied Warsaw to her resistance contacts in Berlin, the capital of the Third Reich. From there the material would be sent west with a friend's diplomatic post. It was a high-risk operation, but the fastest way to get secret reports to London.

While in Berlin, Zo had also collected a large block of cash to bring back to the resistance 'Home Army' in Warsaw. She had spent that night at a safe house, feverishly pasting dollar bills inside her old suitcase before carefully replacing the lining. Then she had caught the early train back to Poland. Breaking her journey back to Warsaw, she was climbing the steps up to her sister's door in the industrial town of Sosnowiec when a terrified neighbour warned her a Gestapo officer was waiting inside.

Zo's network had been betrayed in her absence, and her sister was already in a Gestapo cell. Braving out her shock

and grief, Zo managed to stash her now precious suitcase safely and issue a few warnings before she risked heading on to Warsaw. She was at the station when the Gestapo caught up with her. Rather than making an immediate arrest, she realised they were following her, so she diverted to Kraków in the hope of losing them. Now, exhausted on the late train to Warsaw, she decided she would rather kill herself than risk betraying her friends. But she was not quite ready to die.

An elderly Polish railwayman stood in the corridor, waiting to

open the passenger door at the next station stop, still some miles away. Zo had no way of knowing whether he was a trustworthy patriot or sympathetic to the Nazi cause. "I am from the Home Army," she told him steadily. "Get the door, I'm going to jump." Wordlessly dropping his hand to the lock, the guard lent in and pushed the door wide. As though partners in a dance, in the same fluid movement Zo swung herself out and into the rushing night air.

Zo was an experienced intelligence officer and courier, and had illegally crossed wartime borders more than 100 times. By then the Home Army was one of the largest organised resistance forces in occupied Europe, providing crucial military intelligence to the Polish government-in-exile in London and the Allies. But despite successfully evading the Gestapo by throwing herself from the moving train, once Zo's name appeared on German wanted lists it was clear she could not continue to serve on the same routes.

London calling

Zo had no false modesty about her abilities, but she was astounded when her new orders arrived. Her assignment was to cross the whole of Nazi-occupied Europe, almost 1,000 miles, taking urgent microfilm to London. Once there, she was to undertake two missions as the personal representative of the Home Army commander. It was the first time a woman had been given such authority.

Zo set out with the microfilms hidden inside the shaft of a door key and a brass cigarette lighter. Her dramatic journey would see her almost arrested in Nazi-occupied Paris, where her forged papers were confiscated, and then half-drowned while hiding in the water tanker of top Vichy official Pierre Laval's private train as she illicitly crossed the demarcation line between occupied northern France and so-called 'Free France' in the south.

She would be thrown out of a hotel window when a German border force started questioning her resistance companions, and dodge bullets in the freezing mountain passes of the Pyrenees as she hiked over to Spain. Of the four couriers sent out at roughly the same time, Zo was the only one not to lose her microfilm and successfully reach London.

At first unsure whether to salute her or kiss her hand,

// Zo set out with the microfilms hidden inside the shaft of a door key and a brass cigarette lighter //



Elżbieta pictured on her Poznań University ID in 1927, aged 18. She would go on to become a key figure in the Polish resistance and secure legal military rights and protections for Home Army servicewomen

the Polish officers who met Zo in the British capital struggled to accept her authority. The irony was that while they were wearing military uniform behind their office desks, it was this “captain in a skirt,” as they dismissively referred to her, who had spent the last few years on active service. In fact, Zo had been in uniform herself when Nazi Germany’s invasion of Poland had first plunged the world back into war.

Born in 1909, Zo had been raised in the part of Poland that had been annexed into the Prussian empire until her country regained its independence after the First World War. Although her first language was German, she had always known that she was really Polish, and she had joined her reborn nation’s Women’s Military Auxiliary while at university, ready to serve should Poland’s freedom be threatened again. It was as a commander of this female force that Zo had taken part in the defence of Lwów in September 1939. Building barricades, making petrol

bombs and supporting the anti-aircraft batteries, she had been part of the team that enabled the Polish government, treasury and a significant percentage of her country’s armed forces to flee south through the city.

Having regrouped in France, and served in its defence, the Polish troops who reached Britain were dispatched to defend the east coast of Scotland. Some 2,400 candidates from among their ranks were whittled down to 800 recruits for secret specialist training under the auspices of the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) at various historic country houses. Of these, 579 would complete the rigorous courses designed to turn them into partisan leaders, wireless and forgery experts, demolitions instructors and battalion leaders back behind enemy lines. But, due to a lack of aircraft and the long moonlit nights needed for navigation, only 316 were sworn into the Polish special paramilitary force, the *Cichociemni* or Silent Unseen.



Zo (centre) and comrades in uniform, c1938. The following year, Zo's unit would play a key part in the defence of the city of Lwów. INSET: The Home Army armband worn by Zo during the Warsaw Uprising of 1944

Several of the officers who met Zo in London were Silent Unseen trainees, desperate to be back in action. These men were used to praise from their bosses, admiration from their colleagues and appreciation from women. They found Zo's lack of deference perplexing and laughed at her attempts to issue orders.

When one of the men tried to charm her with a pair of silk stockings, Zo was appalled and shocked that he was starting "some trivial conversation, with flirting... I still had the tragedy of occupied Poland in my mind". As the male London staff jokingly organised "defensive action against her", Zo set about securing legal military status for the women of the Home Army.

Three months later, Zo became the only female member of the Silent Unseen, making her, in Polish, the only *Cichociemna*. Ever since her leap from the moving train, she had been terrified of heights, but she had scraped through parachute training in the Scottish Highlands and at an airfield outside Manchester. It was a crisp September evening in 1943 when she swung her

legs, still bandaged from hard landings, over the edge of the 'Joe hole' in a four-engined Halifax bomber. Moments later she became the only woman ever to parachute from Britain into Nazi-occupied Poland.

Zo would go on to play a vital role in the largest organised act of defiance against Nazi Germany: the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. Her work to secure legal military status for female soldiers meant that, two months later, instead of shooting the captured women as uninformed commandos, for the first time in the war the Nazi military detained female platoons as official POWs. Thousands of lives were saved as a result.

Zo was never a POW herself. Slipping away among the civilian survivors leaving her destroyed capital, she kept up her battle until Poland regained its freedom, in 1989, from the communist regime imposed by the Soviet Union after the war. It was a struggle that would see her arrested more than once, and given a 10-year jail term in the 1950s. When she died in 2009, once again in a free Poland, she was one of the most highly decorated women in her country's history and held the rank – which meant far more to her – of brigadier-general. **H**

// In 1943, Zo became the only woman ever to parachute from Britain into Nazi-occupied Poland //

.....
Clare Mulley's latest book is *Agent Zo: The Untold Story of Fearless WW2 Resistance Fighter Elżbieta Zawacka* (W&N, 2024)



Listen ad-free at [historyextra.com/podcast](https://www.historyextra.com/podcast)
or with ads wherever you get your podcasts



VICTORIAN



Criminal history

Was it really possible to get a fair trial in Victorian Britain? That's just one of the questions tackled by Drew Gray in a detailed exploration of 19th-century crime and punishment, which also touches on prison life, courts and transportation.

GREAT LIVES



Presidential portrait

As the mastermind behind D-Day and the president of an ascendant postwar United States, Dwight D Eisenhower was one of the most influential figures of the 20th century. In a recent *Life of the Week* episode, Iwan Morgan reflects on the leader's legacy today.

MEDIEVAL



Medieval workouts

Keeping fit was surprisingly big business in the Middle Ages and lots of people, certainly in the upper echelons of society, were interested in exercising. Historian Carole Rawcliffe explains who was working out and why they were doing it.

TUDOR



The final wife

Katherine Parr may be one of Henry VIII's less-famous spouses, but that doesn't mean her story is any less fascinating. Elizabeth Norton, historical consultant on the new Katherine Parr film *Firebrand*, tells us why the canny and intelligent queen deserves to be better remembered.

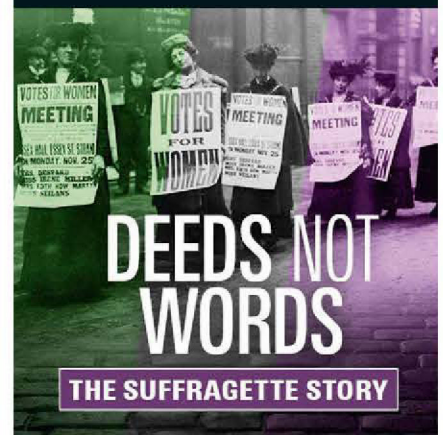
MEDIEVAL



Beyond the myth

"*Beowulf* is so much more than just a story about monster fights," argues Heather O'Donoghue in an illuminating episode on the early medieval poem. As she reveals, *Beowulf* can also tell us about deeper anxieties of the age – from the decline of great powers to the horrors of war.

20TH CENTURY



Fighting for the vote

With their demands for Votes for Women, the suffragettes shook up Edwardian Britain. But as we reveal in our new series, *Deeds Not Words: The Suffragette Story*, their campaign would see them not just marching on the streets, but smashing windows, setting fires and planting bombs.

BBC

Science Focus

HALF PRICE

INTRODUCTORY
SUBSCRIPTION OFFER!

ALL THE LATEST IDEAS, DISCOVERIES, AND BIG QUESTIONS ANSWERED...

Get *BBC Science Focus* delivered direct to your door for half the price when you subscribe! Every issue is packed with news, details of the latest discoveries and the breakthroughs affecting our future, helping you to stay up-to-speed with the fast-moving world of science.

£5.99
£2.99
AN ISSUE*

Subscribe today to *BBC Science Focus* for **HALF PRICE!**

VISIT: [OURMEDIASHOP.COM/SFHA24](https://ourmediashop.com/sfha24)

PHONE: 03330 162 113+ (PLEASE QUOTE SFHA24)

*UK calls will cost the same as other standard fixed line numbers (starting 01 or 02) and are included as part of any inclusive or free minutes allowances (if offered by your phone tariff). Outside of free call packages call charges from mobile phones will cost between 3p and 55p per minute. Lines are open Mon to Fri 9am-5pm. If calling from overseas please call +44 1604 973 721. *Offer ends 31 December 2024. Half price offer is only available to UK residents paying by Direct Debit. Subscriptions will start with the next available issue.

BIOGRAPHY

“In this book, we meet the husband, father and friend – not just the sinister, all-powerful minister”

Tracy Borman on a profile of statesman Robert Cecil > page 78



BOOKS



THE TUDORS

// Porter highlights the ways in which mediocre – even incompetent – men were chosen over Margaret Tudor for positions of authority //

Joanne Paul rates a biography of a queen too often sidelined in her own time – and in later history > page 74

MEDIEVAL

“Catherine Hanley has no shortage of incidents with which to spice her narrative”

Nicholas Vincent reviews a new account of the fateful year 1217 > page 76

20TH CENTURY

“Few people know how we got to the point where the world watched tragedy unfold live on TV”

Amy Shira Teitel on a thoughtful study of the 1986 *Challenger* disaster > page 79

INTERVIEW

Catherine Fletcher explores the roads of ancient Rome – and their role in centuries of history > page 70



INTERVIEW / CATHERINE FLETCHER

“Roman roads turn up so often throughout European history”

CATHERINE FLETCHER talks to Matt Elton about ancient Rome’s continent-spanning road network, how it allowed the empire to flourish – and how it shaped Europe across later centuries

Matt Elton: At the start of your book, you note that Roman roads are fascinating but also mundane. How should we make sense of this apparent contradiction?

Catherine Fletcher: Right from the very beginning, Roman roads did two different things. First, of course, they were designed to get people from point A to point B – and, quite importantly, to get the Roman army from A to B. In doing so, they made everyday life a lot easier for a lot of people. If you lived on a road, you’d be able to get to market more effectively, for instance, or to go to vote – if you were the kind of person who was allowed to vote in Roman society, at least.

But, from the start, Roman roads also had a cultural role. They were a way of saying: “Hello, the Roman empire’s here.” All the way along every road, at mile intervals, were milestones that would tell you how far you had travelled – but also who the current emperor was. So, as well as making everyday life possible in various ways, Roman roads also connected the empire and made a cultural statement.

It’s very easy for us now to be fascinated by those roads, because they’re everywhere. On the other hand, they’re just not as glamorous as monumental sites such as Pompeii, for instance, so we don’t think about them in quite the same way.

You write that the staggering scale of the roads conveys Roman power on a level no individual building can match. Should we see the Roman road network as a kind of monument in itself?

Yes, I think so. When you stop and consider the fact that the routes went right the way across Europe, up into Scotland, around the Mediterranean, along the top of north Africa and through to Turkey, it’s really spectacular. But, perhaps because parts of the

network are hidden now, we don’t realise how remarkable it is. It only became clear to me when I actually started travelling around Europe to see the roads while I was researching this book.

When did construction of the roads start?

The most famous of the roads, the Via Appia, emerged around the fourth century BC. It connected Rome with Brindisi, on the Adriatic coast of the Italian peninsula, and really set a precedent for long-distance roads connecting more and more places as the power of the Roman empire started to expand. The Via Flaminia went north from Rome to Rimini. Other routes crossed the peninsula from elsewhere on the Adriatic coast. And, as the Romans expanded out-

ward beyond Italy, the Via Egnatia went through what’s now Albania and Greece, and the Via Augusta linked Cádiz to the Pyrenees. By the third or fourth century AD, a network of Roman roads stretched all around the Mediterranean – so we’re talking about really impressive growth.

Was length the key feature that set these roads apart from any that had been laid before?

Yes. Vitally, these were long-distance trunk routes that allowed for really effective connections between imperial centres. And, as time went on, that’s what allowed them to be used for a range of services. There was the postal service, for instance, which enabled specific types of official to pass messages along to one another. There was also the rise of what we might now think of motorway service stations: *mansiones*, which had Roman-style baths and places you could change horses; and *mutationes*, which were more basic changing posts where you could pick up fresh horses. So a real infrastructure developed to facilitate very fast travel along these roads.

As well as length and speed of construction, there’s another characteristic often mentioned when talking about Roman roads: straightness. Were they really so very straight – and if so, why?

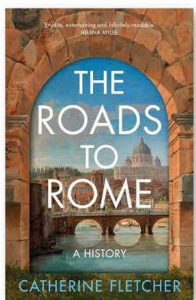
This is something experts argue over! But the network certainly features very impressively long, straight stretches of road. Travelling along the Via Appia from Rome towards Terracina, for instance, involves driving for miles along a very, very straight stretch of road.

This straightness was appealing to the Romans for a few reasons. It made everything very easy to map, and it brought other obvious benefits: you can go faster in wheeled transport on a straight road than if you’re constantly having to pause to navigate bends, for instance. But it also acted as an indicator of the Romans’ power, because building those bridges, making those cuttings and digging those tunnels demonstrated their mastery over nature.

It’s worth saying, of course, that it’s not entirely true that the roads always went dead straight. Sometimes you can sense the builders thinking, when faced with a stretch of difficult terrain: this isn’t going to be worth it. Some roads go around a hill or avoid a particularly steep valley, because of the extra engineering that would have been involved.

What were the roads made from?

They were built using whatever materials were available locally. Some were paved with local stone, as is the case with the Via Appia. Others weren’t paved at all but instead topped with a kind of gravel called *glareae*, which was a bit more like modern tarmac: you just threw



The Roads to Rome: A History

by Catherine Fletcher
(Bodley Head,
400 pages, £25)



PROFILE

Catherine Fletcher is professor of history at Manchester Metropolitan University, and author of numerous books, including *The Beauty and the Terror: An Alternative History of the Italian Renaissance* (Vintage, 2020)

PHOTOGRAPH BY
JAMES SPEAKMAN

small stones across the surface of the road, and waited for them to be beaten into it over time by the traffic.

Who funded the construction of these roads?

In some cases, it was prominent private individuals. The Via Appia, for instance, was funded by Appius Claudius Caecus, one of Rome's most prominent men. He effectively sponsored its construction – and, of course, it was named after him. Some roads were funded by consuls, governors and so on. But in other cases the roads were established by an invading Roman army, either for military purposes or as a way to consolidate relationships with the territory being conquered. However they were funded, once they were built their maintenance became the responsibility of the people living along the route. So that, in a sense, acted as a kind of tax imposed by the Romans on local populations.

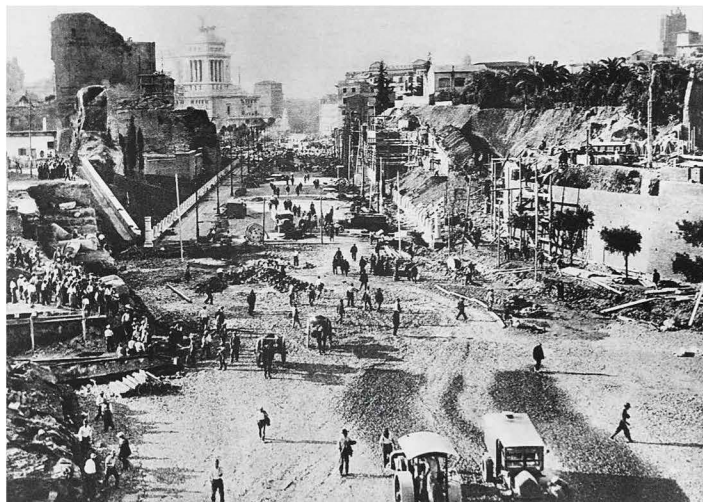
You mentioned that you explored some of the network while you were researching this book. Did that change how you viewed it?

One of the things that struck me is that I hadn't fully considered just how far east this road network extends. I travelled from Vienna through to Bulgaria where, beneath a metro station in the capital, Sofia, you can still walk along part of a Roman road that was on a major route linking what's now Istanbul with Vienna. As someone who grew up during the Cold War, I always saw the Roman empire as somehow belonging to the western world. But, of course, a significant part of this network was behind the iron curtain. It was a much more eastern empire than I was taught as a child.

As you say in the book, these roads were so powerful because they spanned so much of the continent, and drew together so many of its people into an empire. How key was this network in shaping how the Roman empire was run?

To run an empire effectively, you have to know what's going on at the far reaches. You need a method of communicating with its governors, and a method of control that allows you to mobilise troops quickly to reach any given area. The roads definitely provided a useful tool for Roman authorities in their hard, hawkish way of running an empire.

But they also enabled a softer style of imperial governance: bringing people in, making them part of the conversation and allowing them to access the privileges of the capital city. The Colosseum, for instance, included a set of seats for merchants from Cádiz who were doing business in Rome. The roads definitely facilitated a combination of those two ways of ruling an empire.



The Via dei Fori Imperiali scythes through Rome, 1933. "Mussolini drew inspiration from the ancient Romans to build a road network," explains Catherine Fletcher

// The British empire explicitly drew inspiration from the Roman empire in the way in which it constructed roads and railways in India //

What would it have been like to travel along these roads, both when the empire was at its height and as it started to decline?

Travel would have been much slower than we're used to today. The suggestion is that you might have been able to cover as much as 30 miles a day – though that would vary hugely, of course, depending on whether you were on foot or in some sort of carriage. If you were very wealthy, you might even have sat in a kind of chair carried by enslaved people. But whatever the method of transport, it was better to travel as part of a group rather than going alone, because the roads were often quite dangerous. There was a lot of concern about bandits, of being robbed, and of being ripped off by the innkeepers along the route.

But even as the might of the Roman empire started to ebb, the roads were obviously still there. It takes quite a lot to completely ruin a road, and much of the network remained perfectly passable for quite some time. That wasn't the case everywhere: there was a road that ran east to west across southern France, for instance, that we think seems to have fallen out of use. And because some of the network started to become less convenient for very long journeys, people do seem to have switched to sea routes where available, particularly to bypass land routes that were too fragmented or too uncomfortable.

Your book goes on to explore the afterlives of the Roman road network into the subsequent centuries. By the time we reach the crusades, you characterise the roads as being places of both opportunity and danger. Why?

Many of the crusading armies opted to get to the Holy Land by sea. But travelling across water was expensive, particularly for a large army with lots of horses to move. Add in the risks posed by pirates and shipwrecks, and you can see why some – particularly those coming from central Europe – might take an overland route.

But there were risks there, too, of course. We know that the armies irritated local populations, sometimes even raiding them for supplies en route, so there's evidence of local people attacking crusaders. And, as I mentioned earlier, bandits remained an ever-present threat.

As well as acting as a conduit for political and military force, these roads had another key historical use: as pilgrimage routes. What aspects of that story are important?

Pilgrimage was a phenomenon that existed from very early on in the history of Christianity, and offers another side to the story of Roman roads. Take the apostle St Paul who, after various periods of house arrest, was forced to travel to Rome to go on trial. He landed at the



Rome's road to global domination

You can hear an extended version of this interview on our podcast soon: historyextra.com/podcast



Hard road A section of the Via Flaminia – the ancient route linking Rome with Rimini – in Fossombrone. Construction of this road involved major feats of engineering, including boring a tunnel through a mountain

trading port of Puteoli [now Pozzuoli, in Campania], where he was greeted by local Christians, and made his way up the Via Appia.

The reason that's interesting is because we see later travellers, and later tourists, who are drawn to the roads not because they buy into the narrative of the Roman empire's greatness but because they identify with the figure of Paul as someone persecuted by the Romans.

During the Renaissance era, the trend for making cultural journeys along these roads really came to the fore. Did that change how they were regarded?

Whereas the roads had primarily been noted for their practical value – for pilgrims, for instance, as a way of getting to Rome – the interest in ancient cultures that developed during the Renaissance period meant that Roman roads started to be seen as interesting cultural artefacts in their own right.

In the 15th century, for instance, Pope Pius II became very agitated when he witnessed people digging up ancient Roman roads to remove their stones. He asked a local ruler of lands south of Rome to stop it going on, and to make sure the roads were preserved and kept in situ. That was the start of a series of efforts by Renaissance popes and rulers to preserve and care for ancient artefacts and learn more about them. We can see a similar growth in interest among travellers then, too.

Alongside this growing recognition of the roads' cultural value, the need for military and political power obviously continued into the 19th and 20th centuries. Did the roads also continue to be important then, both as routes and as symbols?

Absolutely. Napoleon, for instance, was a great fan of Roman roads. And, of course, in the early 20th century Italy had a Fascist government, led by Mussolini, which had quite an ambiguous relationship with the ancient past. It wanted to be very modern – a cult grew up around the motor car and the virtue of speed – but Mussolini himself drew inspiration from the ancient Romans to build a road network.

A key example of a Fascist road can still be seen near the Roman Forum itself. There's a big road linking the Colosseum at one end with the huge white typewriter monument, the 'Altar of the Fatherland' [aka the Victor Emmanuel II National Monument], at the other.

That route was cut right through the city to enable Mussolini's motorcade to parade through the middle of an ancient setting.

He wasn't alone in that fixation, either. Hitler famously launched a programme building autobahns. He is supposed to have said that, when he conquered Russia, he wanted to expand an imperial road network into that nation along the lines of the routes created by the ancient Romans.

So would you say that this history is valuable because it reveals the nature of political power across the centuries?

I think so, because Roman roads turn up so often throughout European history! When I started researching this book, I thought that I would be writing about the logistics of the journey to Rome, so I was astonished by the number of major historical events I ran into. We've talked about some of them, but

there are many others. Charlemagne had a grand vision for a road network in the eighth and ninth centuries. Much later, the British empire explicitly drew inspiration from the Roman empire in the way in which it constructed roads and railways in India.

Underlying all of these examples is the fact that, when European powers have gone about growing and expanding outside their borders, the model they have very often looked to is the Roman empire. That's because we can still see physical evidence of its extent, partly in the form of its road network. As that's the way European rulers have thought over the centuries, understanding the relationship between the Roman empire and its infrastructure is really important.

We've discussed some examples, but did you follow any other specific roads you'd recommend as routes into this history?

Where the Via Flaminia reaches a place called Furlo [in the Marche region of central Italy], there's a road that heads through an incredibly steep valley between mountains. It's cut into the rock and, at a certain point, the people building it were no longer able to terrace it into the side of the valley, and instead had to make a tunnel. It's spectacular, and incredible to think of them digging halfway up a cliff, with only basic tools and no electricity.

In Britain, I'd advise people to drive along the A5 near Wroxeter in Shropshire, which gives a good sense of a straight Roman road. If you continue east along the A5, to the village of Wall, you can see beautifully preserved remnants of one of the *mansiones* service stations.

Finally, which were better: Roman roads at their peak, or the roads we have today?

I think that's a very unfair comparison [laughs]! You see that kind of meme pop up online every so often – someone comparing a pothole-riddled modern road with a perfectly paved Roman one. But the difference is, of course, nobody was trying to drive a juggernaut along their roads – they would break very quickly if you did. And, as we've discussed, it's not as if the Romans managed to maintain a perfect road network. Roads fall into disrepair, their upkeep requires a lot of effort, and Roman authorities faced very similar maintenance and infrastructure issues as we do today. 



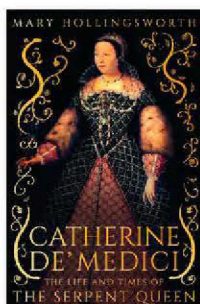
More than a matriarch

A portrait of Margaret Tudor commissioned by her great-great-grandson, Charles I. She “deserves to be remembered for the woman she was, not just for the powerful men whose lives she touched”, says Joanne Paul

TUDOR

An ode to a forgotten Tudor

JOANNE PAUL is impressed by an engaging biography of Henry VIII’s sister, Margaret Tudor, who is all too often underestimated in historical accounts



The Thistle and the Rose: The Extraordinary Life of Margaret Tudor

by Linda Porter

Apollo, 400 pages, £27.99

On an August day in 1503, a resplendent royal bride processed through the chapel of Holyrood Palace in Edinburgh. Her dress was of white damask –

perhaps emphasising her purity – bordered with crimson velvet. She wore a golden crown matching her necklace of gold, both decorated with gems and pearls. Her long train was carried by a countess, but was so heavy that a gentleman usher had to step in at the last minute to assist.

She was joined at the altar by her dashing groom, dressed to match in white damask with a jacket of crimson satin and scarlet hose. Though he did not wear a crown – instead opting for a black bonnet ornamented with a single large ruby – he was no less royal.

Matched in garb and regality, there was one notable disparity between the dazzling pair: James IV was a man of 30, whereas his bride, Margaret Tudor, was only 13. Named for her redoubtable grandmother – who at just 13 had given birth to the progenitor of the Tudor dynasty, Henry VII – this Margaret, too, was a child bride. She would also become the matriarch of a royal dynasty.

Linda Porter’s thorough and compelling new biography of this oft-overlooked Tudor balances well the tragedy of Margaret’s gilded cage with the significance of her captivating

// Margaret comes across as a powerful, passionate woman who knew her own mind and was certainly not timid about sharing it //

life. Married to a foreign king at 13, Margaret was pregnant at 16, giving birth to a son a full 30 years before her younger brother, Henry VIII, managed to produce his sought-after male heir. Though Margaret's first son died in infancy, her ability to produce sons – heirs to both the Scottish and English thrones – did not go unnoticed by her competitive and paranoid brother. In the end, the continuance of the English royal line did come from Margaret: in 1603, her great-grandson, James VI of Scotland, became James I of England, uniting the crowns of her two nations.

An underestimated woman

Whether in popular retellings or even academic histories, Margaret has become a woman oft mentioned but rarely fully explored – passed over, written out or even replaced more often than she is treated with any seriousness.

A failure to take Margaret seriously may, in fact, be the critical thread running through Porter's take. Henry VIII underestimated her, to his ultimate regret, and Porter continually highlights the ways in which profoundly mediocre – even incompetent – men were chosen over Margaret for positions of authority. Porter also has some very choice words for the legacy left by sexist criticisms of Margaret's emotional frailties. Her biography serves as a corrective, in the same way that biographers have reconsidered the remarkably similar choices made by Margaret's granddaughter, Mary, Queen of Scots.

Porter manages to pull vivid details out of her sources – sources that are often more fulsome than those we have for the Tudor court, as in the case of Margaret's wedding. The setting is a Scottish court in transition, far more dangerous and cut-throat than its

English equivalent, but one in which the Renaissance is an increasingly influential presence, thanks to the interests of James IV.

The king of Scots himself emerges as a charismatic, capable and truly dedicated ruler – a rarity in an age of egotistical kings. He is a loving husband, if not a loyal one. Affable, intelligent and sensitive, the fact that he enjoyed picking up a needle and thread and partaking in embroidery alongside his wife makes him endearing at a distance of five centuries. Margaret herself comes across as a powerful and passionate woman who knew her own mind and was certainly not timid about sharing it.

At times, the biography feels like it moves a little far from Margaret's own experience, though Porter recounts the vicissitudes of British and European politics with clarity and panache. Some might find the occasional references to present-day events and culture a tad jarring – a comparison to *Game of Thrones*, for instance, will soon date the biography.

However, this narrative voice also allows Porter to level important critiques of previous biographers and issue a rallying cry to the new generation of historians who will consider women like Margaret. Porter's compelling and heartbreaking description of the pivotal 1513 battle of Flodden – a “quagmire of death”, as she puts it – is made more concrete for readers because of the step into the present she makes in her reflection on it. Flodden was a turning point in Scottish history, to be sure, and it was a very personal crossroads for Margaret as well.

In 1513 – just 10 years after her wedding, and aged 23 – Margaret was a widow, her husband having been slain in battle against her brother's army at Flodden. In the decade since her procession into the chapel at Holyrood, Margaret had made a companion of death. She had lost three children, both of her parents, at least two of her siblings and now her husband. James IV, always trusting in his queen's judgment and regality, had named her regent in the event of his demise. Pregnant with her late husband's child, Margaret was now the effective ruler of Scotland, governing for her one-year-old son, James V.

Margaret is often remembered as the daughter, sister and mother of kings. Porter, however, offers us a potent reminder that she was also a ruling queen of a tumultuous nation in an increasingly turbulent age. She deserves to be remembered for the woman she was, not just for the powerful men whose lives she touched. **H**

.....
Joanne Paul is a historian, writer and broadcaster. Her latest book is *The House of Dudley: A New History of Tudor England* (Penguin, 2022)

FROM FACT TO FICTION

Poison penned

Cathryn Kemp (pictured) discusses *A Poisoner's Tale*, her novel about a woman in Rome who helped wives kill husbands

Your debut novel is based on the case of 17th-century Italian poisoner Giulia Tofana. What drew you to this story?

Legend says that Giulia brewed a potion called Aqua Tofana, which she dispensed to the abused wives of Rome to rid them of their husbands at a time when divorce was impossible for women. Men were dying like flies – approximately 1,000 were killed – and this came to the attention of Inquisitor Pope Alexander VII. To me, Giulia represented female resistance in a time of subordination. She was a divisive figure: was she a murderer or a saviour? How far would she go to defend the downtrodden women of Rome?

What do you hope your novel reveals about these characters and events?

The challenge in writing Giulia's story was that we already know how it ends – except, of course, we don't know much at all. When she lived, men's lives were recorded and noted through the legal or ecclesiastical systems. Women, on the other hand, were chattels who belonged to their fathers and then their husbands. Their stories were not recorded or noted, and this slanted their history, silenced their voices, leaving us with the realm of myth rather than fact and document. It was within this space that I felt Giulia could begin to breathe again. She could be made real, to live out at least one version of her life – a version that celebrates her agency, power and independence as much as it exposes her subjugation and oppression.

How did you go about recreating the world of Rome in the period?

With plenty of research! I had a huge amount of help translating contemporaneous accounts of events, diaries and trial records, which was so helpful in building Giulia's world.

A Poisoner's Tale

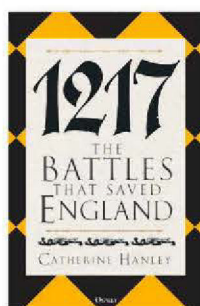
by Cathryn Kemp
Bantam, 400 pages, £16.99



MEDIEVAL

The other French invasion

NICHOLAS VINCENT enjoys a lively if uneven account of an extraordinary year in which baronial revolt and a rampaging French king almost put an end to the English monarchy



1217: The Battles that Saved England
by Catherine Hanley
Osprey Publishing
304 pages, £25

How many of her readers, Catherine Hanley enquires, have ever heard of King Louis I of England? Or know that, exactly 150 years after the Norman conquest of 1066, a French army spent a year occupying most of southern England? The answer, she suggests, is very few.

Perhaps because our 'island story' has room for only one French conquest, itself safely distanced nearly a millennium ago, the civil war that ended the reign of King John is today remembered for Magna Carta but little else.

Readers will perhaps have heard of John's disastrous loss of his treasure while crossing the Wash – still the object of Indiana Jones-like ventures, almost certainly doomed to disappointment. They perhaps know the rumours that John died of poisoning, or alternatively – according to one contemporary chronicler – from the effects of dining on peaches and newly fermented cider. For those seeking a brief and readable guide to what happened next, Hanley's book can be recommended.

Surveying a French invasion via Thanet, two great sieges of Dover Castle, and two great battles – the first at Lincoln in May 1217, the second off the coast of Sandwich three months later – Hanley has no shortage of incidents with which to spice her narrative. Nor does she want for contrasting characters, from the vile King John to the veteran William Marshal, England's greatest knight, hero of a contemporary epic poem packed with colourful details.

Even the physical memorials of this war can still be visited, from Lincoln's appropriately named Steep Hill to the Chapel of St Bartholomew at Sandwich, built to commemorate the naval victory of August 1217 – which was, in many ways, just as decisive for English history as Trafalgar or the Spanish Armada.



Landing craft Louis VIII of France arrives with his troops in England, in a 13th-century manuscript. "Perhaps our 'island story' has room for only one French conquest," says Nicholas Vincent of this lesser-known episode

// The naval victory of August 1217 was, in many ways, just as decisive for English history as Trafalgar or the Spanish Armada //

Straddling the always troublesome divide between the academic and the popular, Hanley's prose is not exactly cliché-light. Readers will encounter an over-abundance of 'U-turns', 'win-win' situations, and relationships described as 'rocky'.

Nor are facts always as reported. For example, John was actually the fifth, not the fourth, of Henry II's legitimate sons. Louis was never proclaimed king – not through his own miscalculation, but for lack

of any English bishop prepared to crown him. And so the academic pedant might plough on.

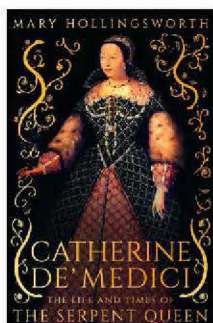
More peculiar is Hanley's omission of two set pieces. First was the sewing of white crosses onto the armour of the royalist army at Lincoln, thereby officially declaring the first – and almost the last – 'crusade' ever fought on English soil. Second came the ritual humiliation of Louis, following the peace treaty of September 1217, when he was sentenced to public scourging at Lambeth wearing nothing save his underwear.

Instead, as in many a Hollywood blockbuster, we end here with a sudden fade and a series of captions telling us who did what afterwards. For those craving deeper engagement, David Carpenter's *Minority of Henry III* remains the classic account. For readers in rather more of a hurry, Hanley serves up a refreshingly frothy aperitif: the Prosecco to Carpenter's more substantial vintage. **E**

Nicholas Vincent is professor of medieval history at the University of East Anglia

The serpent in a new light

ESTELLE PARANQUE lauds a book that rehabilitates the often maligned figure of Catherine de' Medici, a powerful queen who led with loyalty and conviction



Catherine de' Medici: The Life and Times of the Serpent Queen
by Mary Hollingsworth
Apollo, 480 pages, £30

Catherine de' Medici's reputation has, it's fair to say, been blackened over the

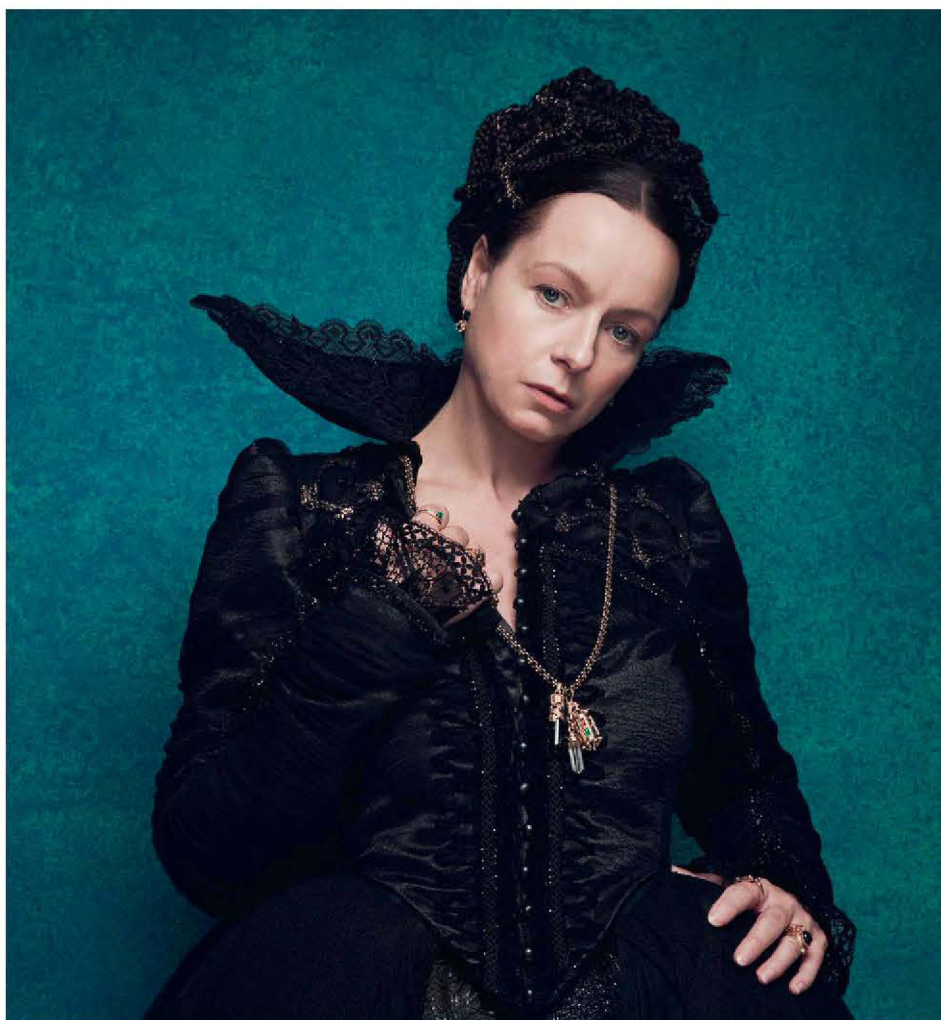
centuries. Even in popular media – such as the STARZ television series *The Serpent Queen* – her dark legend is emphasised, from her interest in dark magic to her alleged involvement with murders and poisons. Yet little by little, biographers and historians work to rehabilitate her legacy.

The subtitle of Mary Hollingsworth's new book, *The Life and Times of the Serpent Queen*, threatens to perpetuate old tropes. It's clearly just a marketing ploy, though, because the book thoughtfully reassesses her reign. Hollingsworth's knowledge of Catherine's life, as well as her mastery of Italian history, enables her to portray Catherine as the true European Renaissance queen she was.

Right from the prologue, Hollingsworth sets out to reinstate Catherine at the centre of 16th-century politics as “one of the most influential figures of her time”. Exploring her Italian lineage, as well as her diplomatic networks and ties across Europe, the author reveals the complex role Catherine had to play when she became queen-mother of France – a queen without a husband-king.

The chapter on the episode that most badly tarnished Catherine's reputation – the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572 – is packed with vivid details, reanimating one of the bloodiest days of the second half of the 16th century. This dramatic event shaped political and diplomatic relations, but also irreversibly undermined the Valois dynasty and their legacy – including Catherine's.

In this biography, the tumultuous years of religious civil wars that ravaged France for over three decades are central to understanding Catherine's notorious reputation. From the difficult situation with the Catholic League to the complex international relations with Spain, England and the Netherlands,



Dark star Samantha Morton plays Catherine de' Medici in the TV series *The Serpent Queen*, the second series of which begins in July. The queen's “reputation has been blackened over the centuries”, says Estelle Paranque

// Catherine had to play a complex role when she became queen-mother of France – a queen without a husband-king //

this book sheds light not only on Catherine's life but also on the turbulent waters she was forced to navigate as a female ruler.

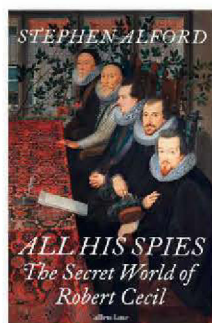
This expert biography reveals Catherine as a woman of virtue, loyalty and, ultimately, power. The fact that books are still published about her stands as a testament to her legacy. Hollingsworth's eloquent prose and fine research sheds light on a Renaissance queen who truly deserves to be remembered as such. **H**

Estelle Paranque is associate professor in early modern history at Northeastern University London, and author of *Blood, Fire and Gold: The Story of Elizabeth I and Catherine de Medici* (Ebury, 2022)

TUDOR/STUART

The power behind two monarchs

TRACY BORMAN is fascinated by a compelling account of Robert Cecil, a hugely influential but suitably little-known spymaster to Elizabeth I and James VI & I



All His Spies: The Secret World of Robert Cecil

by Stephen Alford
Allen Lane,
448 pages, £30

When exploring the world of the Tudors, you encounter a dazzling cast of

larger-than-life characters who have proved irresistible fodder for historians, biographers and screenwriters over the centuries. Robert Cecil isn't one of them. He seems a shadowy figure, somehow – always in the background, despite being at the very forefront of political affairs during the reigns of Elizabeth I and her successor, James VI & I. His portrait shows a man who is at best unprepossessing: of a slight, stooped frame (he had a curvature of the spine), pale-faced and dressed all in black. Even Elizabeth – who, in her later years, depended upon him more than any other adviser – called him “pygmy” and “little man”, while her successor referred to him disparagingly as “my little beagle”.

But as Stephen Alford's compelling new study proves, looks can be deceiving. “No one had power quite like his – not in England, not perhaps in Europe,” Alford writes. It is a bold claim, particularly when one considers the likes of Cardinal Wolsey, Thomas Cromwell and Cecil's own father, William, Lord Burghley. By the end of the book, though, I was convinced. Cecil was that rare beast: a man who not only survived a change of reign – a change of dynasty – but enjoyed even greater power under the new monarch than he had under the old.

It might be overstating things to say that James owed his English throne to Cecil, but the shrewd, all-seeing adviser had certainly smoothed the path to his accession. Little wonder that the new king immediately raised him to the peerage, first as Baron Cecil of Essendon, and soon after as Viscount Cranborne and Earl of Salisbury. Further promotions followed in the years to come: Cecil was retained in the posts of secretary of state and lord privy seal, and, in 1608, James made him lord high treasurer. With titles came power.

“Though you are but a little man, I shall shortly load your shoulders with business,” James reportedly told Cecil in their first meeting. He certainly meant it. It might have been at least partly the crushing weight of business that hastened Cecil's death in 1612, at the age of just 48.

A protege of Elizabeth's great spymaster, Sir Francis Walsingham, Cecil had inherited one of the most sophisticated espionage networks on the planet – and made it his own. This world of secrets and deceptions is one with which Alford is more familiar than

most, having brought it vividly to life in *The Watchers*, his seminal work. *All His Spies* continues the narrative into the early years of James's reign, when even more deadly conspiracies swirled about the throne – the gunpowder plot, in particular.

What sets this book apart, though, is the flesh and bones that it lends to the figure of the “bloodless bureaucrat”, who died mostly unmourned – indeed, despised for his riches and influence. Alford has taken full advantage of the embarrassment of riches that is the Cecil family papers. These have been plundered exhaustively by generations of Tudor historians but – until now – the telling personal details have been largely overlooked. With this book, at last, we can meet Cecil the husband, father and friend, not just the sinister, all-powerful minister to whom two monarchs owed their lives. **H**

// Cecil was that rare beast: a man who not only survived a change of reign – a change of dynasty – but enjoyed even greater power //

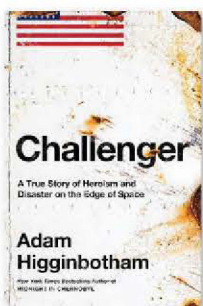
Tracy Borman is a historian, author and joint chief curator of Historic Royal Palaces. Her latest book is *Anne Boleyn & Elizabeth I: The Mother and Daughter Who Changed History* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2023)



Bloodless bureaucrat? This pallid portrait of Robert Cecil, painted in the early years of the 17th century, belies the wiles of a man who wielded huge power and controlled a crucial espionage network

Nasa's fatal frontier

AMY SHIRA TEITEL is engrossed by an insightful telling of the story behind the *Challenger* disaster



Challenger: A True Story of Heroism and Disaster on the Edge of Space
by Adam Higginbotham
Viking, 576 pages, £25

The Y-shaped plume that was strewn across

the sky as the space shuttle *Challenger* disintegrated just 73 seconds after launch on 28 January 1986 is an image burned into our collective memories. It's so well known that even the casual space enthusiast can point to the O-ring as the culprit. But few people know how we got to the point where the world watched tragedy unfold live on their television screens. This is the complex story Adam Higginbotham deftly weaves.

Nasa's Apollo era, lauded as the golden age of space flight, wasn't without setbacks, most notably the Apollo 1 fire in 1967 that killed three astronauts on the launch pad during a routine test.

It's here that Higginbotham begins his narrative – the moment when Nasa faced its fallibility, and the US realised that space flight, however glamorous, is a dangerous endeavour. Following the agency's recovery, and its success with the remainder of the Apollo programme – which famously included landing the first astronauts on the moon – we're left with the impression that Nasa had learned to think creatively about disaster and heed issues as they were raised.

Reading Higginbotham's book, we quickly discover that the shuttle programme didn't take that lesson on board. Reusable space planes – a long-standing dream for engineers – proved difficult to bring to fruition, particularly in the post-Apollo era in which budgets were dwindling and pressure to get Americans back into space was mounting.

Higginbotham recounts the troubled development of the shuttle, beginning with the tiled heat shield. Known issues were overlooked in the race to launch on schedule. The first mission, in 1981, suffered sufficient

damage during launch that Nasa had to borrow a Key Hole spy satellite to photograph and assess the damage. Commander John Young – an experienced astronaut – who had walked on the moon, was stunned to have survived this first flight.

The problems continued to mount. Higginbotham paints a picture in which shuttle crews were microseconds from death on every flight. Before long, the Thiokol-built solid rocket boosters emerged as the sticking point. These stages relied on rubber O-rings to seal the gap between segments during ascent. Because the boosters were jettisoned and recovered after launch, the engineers could see the scorch marks and charred build-up where this material had failed. Recounting conversations between engineers, Higginbotham brings us into the inner circle of people who realised that this piece of rubber could, on a cold morning, bring down a mission.

The engineers' story runs parallel with the crews'. We meet the first class of shuttle astronauts who diversified the astronaut corps, then Christa McAuliffe, the teacher in space chosen to inspire a generation. Her flight marked a new era. After long years when test pilots were the only people to qualify for space flight, the new frontier was starting to open to everyone.

These narratives converge in the lead-up to *Challenger's* ill-fated 1986 mission. Higginbotham expertly builds tension and drama – an impressive feat of storytelling when we already know what happens next. He brings us in on the phone calls made on the night before launch, and continues on to the all-important moment when the Thiokol engineers – against their better judgment – gave in to Nasa's 'go fever' and agreed to launch.

Higginbotham blends meticulous research with accessible prose, making for a profoundly informative book that shows rather than tells. It's rare for a space book to appeal to a general audience, but *Challenger* will undoubtedly draw in a range of readers with diverse interests. **U**

.....
Amy Shira Teitel is a writer, historian and broadcaster. Her books include *Fighting for Space* (Grand Central, 2020)

ON THE PODCAST

Stellar stories

Deputy editor **Matt Elton** picks three episodes of the *HistoryExtra* podcast charting trips into space

The race for space



Forged in the Cold War era, the early space race revealed as much about 20th-century tensions as it did about our enduring urge to explore. In this 2021 instalment of the podcast's

long-running Everything You Wanted to Know series, historian Tom Ellis tackled listener questions and popular search-engine queries on the subject. historyextra.com/space-race-pod

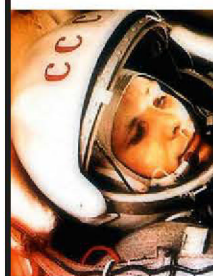
The great beyond



By November 2023, only 676 humans had ever travelled into space. In this podcast episode recorded the same year, British European Space Agency astronaut

Tim Peake charted six decades of space exploration, the key forces and figures that shaped our first tentative steps away from Earth in the second half of the 20th century, and his own experiences of reaching for the stars. historyextra.com/tim-peake-pod

Heavenly creatures



It's not just humans who have gone to space, of course. This interview with author Stephen Walker reminds us of the thousands of animals – monkeys, dogs and tortoises among them – sent

skyward as part of our efforts to hone the technology required to enable humans to make the trip. For many, it was far from a pleasant experience. historyextra.com/space-animals-pod

ENCOUNTERS

DIARY By Jonathan Wright and Danny Bird
HISTORY COOKBOOK Westminster fool
EXPLORE Avebury, Wiltshire

FILM

Home on the range

Throughout his career Kevin Costner has displayed a fascination with big-screen westerns, but even the Academy Award-winning director and star of *Dances with Wolves* (1990) has never before attempted anything as ambitious as *Horizon: An American Saga*. This planned four-film epic will chart US expansion west over 15 years spanning the American Civil War era, and telling the story from multiple viewpoints.

The first 'chapter' debuted at the Cannes Film Festival where, it's fair to say, it received mixed reviews. Critics were frustrated by the time it took for multiple characters to be introduced and plot lines established. For those prepared to be patient, though, this may be a treat – and Chapter 2 will be along in August.

Horizon: An American Saga – Chapter 1

On general release in cinemas



Kevin Costner stars (as Hayes Ellison, here with Jamie Campbell Bower as Caleb Sykes) in the four-part saga *Horizon*, which explores US expansion west before, during and after the Civil War



What's on this week?

Visit [historyextra.com](https://www.historyextra.com) for updates on upcoming history TV and radio programmes



EXHIBITIONS

Barbie: The Exhibition

The Design Museum, London /
5 July 2024 to 23 February 2025 /
designmuseum.org

For the past 65 years, the impossibly tip-toed figure of Barbie has loomed large over the world of children's toys. From this summer, more than 180 of the rarest models, plus accessories from the brand's inception to the present day, will be displayed at the Design Museum in Kensington. Featuring iconic incarnations – such as Sunset Malibu Barbie; pioneering iterations, including the first Barbie with Down syndrome; and Dreamhouses, cars and furnishings – the Barbie universe holds up a mirror to our evolving attitudes to topics such as beauty, multiculturalism and identity.

Paris 1924: Sport, Art and the Body

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge /
19 July to 3 November /
fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk

As all eyes turn to the French capital for this summer's Games of the XXXIII Olympiad, the Fitzwilliam Museum looks back a century to the last time the city hosted the spectacle. The exhibition explores the pivotal role that the event played in shaping the aesthetic and direction of international sport, fusing tradition with innovation and revolutionising attitudes to the human body, class, race and nationalism. Among other displays, the exhibition showcases the Cambridge alumni who won 11 medals in 1924 – notably Harold



Abrahams, whose achievement was immortalised in the Academy Award-winning 1981 film *Chariots of Fire*.

The Valleys

National Museum Cardiff / Ends 3 November /
museum.wales/cardiff

The Welsh Valleys have inspired both the romantic imagination and lazy stereotypes. Now stories of people who have lived and worked here since the 18th century are told through more than 200 artworks, photographs and pieces of footage from dozens of artists, along with testimonies from members of these largely working-class communities. The exhibition spotlights a region that has been on the frontline of many of the convulsions of modern Britain.

Linford Christie celebrates his victory in the 100m final at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics



TV

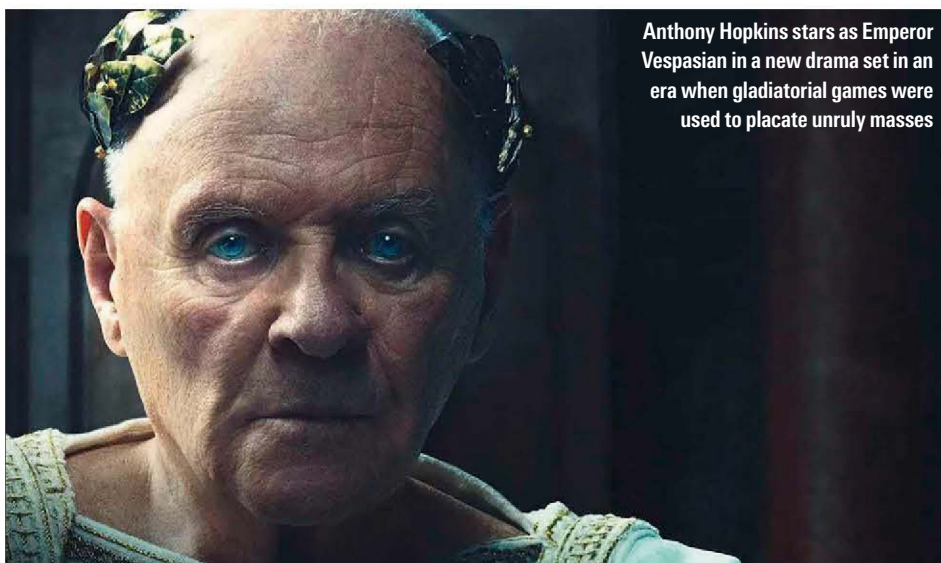
The long view on a short race

In 1992, Linford Christie won 100m gold at the Barcelona Olympics, crossing the line in 9.96 seconds. His reputation was then tarnished in 1999 when, after coming out of retirement, he tested positive for the banned substance nandrolone.

Once among the most famous people in Britain, Christie has rarely spoken about either his success or the controversy that later overshadowed it. Now a 90-minute documentary, which arrives on screens around the same time as coverage of the Paris Olympics, finds him confronting his past. Expect evocative archive footage and a story that touches on key themes in recent British history, notably racism and the power of the media.

Linford

BBC One / late July



Anthony Hopkins stars as Emperor Vespasian in a new drama set in an era when gladiatorial games were used to placate unruly masses

TV

Bread and circuses

Created by scriptwriter Robert Rodat (*Saving Private Ryan*) and inspired by Daniel P Mannix's 1958 bestseller, *Those About to Die* is a lavish new swords-and-sandals drama that takes us to Rome in AD 79. It's a city where the authorities use a combination of free food plus increasingly violent entertainment to keep a fractious population in line.

The 10-part series promises to delve into a corrupt world of power brokers, gamblers and

those at the sharp end of things – the chariot riders and gladiators who competed at Circus Maximus and the Colosseum. The cast includes Anthony Hopkins as Emperor Vespasian, while Roland Emmerich (*Independence Day*) was among those who developed the series for TV.

Those About to Die

Prime Video / Streaming from Friday 19 July



TV

Presenters Tim Dunn and Siddie Holloway delve into the bowels of London in a new series exploring the Underground

What lies beneath

Once again pinching the keys to rarely seen parts of London's Tube network, railway historian Tim Dunn joins Siddie Holloway from the London Transport Museum to head beneath the streets and uncover more *Secrets of the London Underground*.

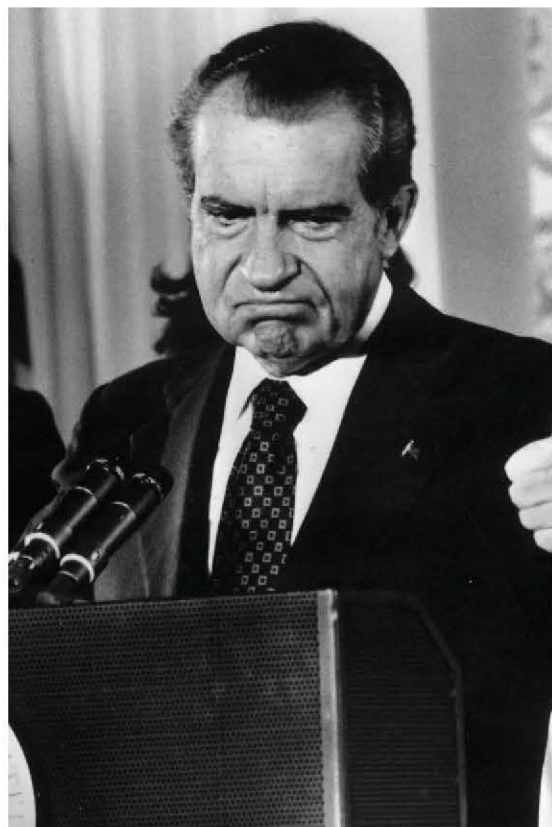
Memorable moments in the fourth series include a visit to South Kentish Town, a station on the High Barnet branch of the Northern Line that closed a century ago, victim of low

passenger numbers. Ghostly noises emanate from its dank, dark, disused tunnels, as Dunn and Holloway discover.

Other highlights include visits to the busy terminus stations Paddington and Waterloo, where there's plenty of unexpected history to be found – if you know where to look.

Secrets of the London Underground

Yesterday / From Tuesday 2 July



GETTY IMAGES/YESTERDAY

President Nixon saying goodbye to White House staff on 9 August 1974, having been engulfed by the Watergate scandal

TV

Fall from grace

The political career of Richard Milhous Nixon (1913–94) ended in ignominious failure. Engulfed by scandal surrounding the Watergate break-in, and facing impeachment, the 37th president of the US was forced from office. Nixon's legal troubles were so bad that his successor, former vice-president Gerald Ford, issued Proclamation 4311 to ensure his former boss stayed out of jail.

How did all this come to pass? Find out the answers in a new four-part series profiling 'Tricky Dick'. It also covers less-lurid parts of Nixon's story, such as his early political career in California and the John F Kennedy-Nixon TV debates conducted during the 1960 presidential campaign – the first time that candidates had faced off in this way. **ITV**

Tricky Dick

Sky History / From Thursday 25 July

RADIO HIGHLIGHTS

Conspiracies and cell blocks

We need to pay more attention to what we don't know. That is the message of writer, podcaster and former MP Rory Stewart in his new six-part series **The Long History of Ignorance: From Confucius to QAnon** (BBC Radio 4, Thursday 11 July). Stewart's central thesis here, which draws on history and philosophical writings, is that ignorance is not simply an absence of knowledge but a fundamental state of being for humankind. Could an appreciation of this idea improve our decision-making?

The 1983 Maze breakout, in which 38 prisoners escaped from H-Block 7 of the infamous HM Prison Maze in Northern Ireland, was a propaganda coup for the IRA. But how was this allowed to happen? Built around the height of the Troubles, the Maze was reputedly the highest-security prison in Europe. In **The History Podcast: Escape from the Maze** (BBC Radio 4 and BBC Sounds, Monday 15 July), Carlo Gébler – who was a writing tutor at the jail in the 1990s – speaks with former prisoners and security personnel to get the inside story.

We typically don't much think about how music sounded in the past but, as a new programme shows, it can be revealing. In **Sunday Feature: Music of the Vikings** (BBC Radio 3, Sunday 14 July), historian Eleanor Rosamund Barraclough teams up with Einar Selvik (former drummer of black metal band Gorgoroth, right). Using ancient instruments and sampling technology, the pair craft a song setting fit for a Viking feast.

Also this month, Joe Queenan aims his acerbic wit at people we don't know in

Archive on 4: A Brief History of Strangers

(BBC Radio 4, Saturday 13 July). And, exploring the development of medicine, **The Human Subject** (BBC Radio 4, Sunday 14 July), hosted by Dr Adam Rutherford and Dr Julia Shaw, tells stories of dodgy experiments and unintended consequences. **ITV**



RECIPE

Westminster fool

ELEANOR BARNETT introduces an alcohol-tinged variant of a simple dessert that's been popular since the 17th century



With politics on my mind, I remembered a recipe, 'To make a Westminster-Fool', that I once stumbled upon in Hannah Glasse's bestselling 18th-century book *The Art of Cookery, Made Plain and Easy*.

A fool is, of course, a silly person or an idiot. But a fool is also a type of dessert that appeared in English recipe books at the turn of the 17th century. Simple, sweet and fun, the name is apt for a whimsical, trivial dish served at the end of a more substantial meal.

There are many types, the most famous perhaps being the gooseberry fool. In the mid-19th century, this dish was so popular that English poet Edward Lear penned a nonsensical limerick about it:

*There was an Old Person of Leeds,
Whose head was infested with beads;
She sat on a stool
And ate gooseberry-fool,
Which agreed with that Person of Leeds.*

Since the 17th century, other fools – such as strawberry, raspberry, apple, rhubarb and orange – have been made by combining cooked and mashed fruit with custard or cream.

The Norfolk fool adds another element: bread. According to the recipe provided by Gervase Markham in his 1615 cookbook *The English Huswife*, the Norfolk fool was made by flavouring a thick, sweetened custard with cinnamon and nutmeg, then pouring this over manchet (fine white bread) and garnishing the dish with caraway or cinnamon comfits (sugar-coated seeds), slices of dates or scraped sugar.



Elizabeth Cromwell, wife of Lord Protector Oliver, who may have created a fool flavoured with sherry

Perhaps you've noticed that this is starting to sound remarkably similar to a trifle, another humbly named dessert. The earliest known mention of a trifle is in Thomas Dawson's late 16th-century cookery book *The Good Huswives Jewell*, which described a simple dish of sweetened cream flavoured with ginger and rose water, warmed and served in a bowl. In the 1750s, trifle started to become something that we would recognise today, using biscuits soaked in wine. And it was only in the 20th century that packaged gelatine was being used to add a layer of jelly, rather than fruit jam. In the early modern era, 'fool' and 'trifle' were often used interchangeably, and both desserts contributed to the development of the modern trifle.

So what was a Westminster fool? Glasse's recipe calls for a sweet custard to be made with rose water, mace and nutmeg, which was poured over sherry-soaked bread. It is the addition of this alcoholic element that seems to set the Westminster version apart from other fools.

Though it's tempting to imagine that the 'Westminster' element of the name was inspired by the antics of the boozed-up political class, perhaps it was simply there that this delicious dessert was first dreamed up. Elizabeth Cromwell, wife of Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell, supposedly made a similar sherry-soaked fool. Either way, give it a go – and perhaps add some fruit syrup for a little extra flavour.



The boozy flavour of the Westminster fool sets it apart from other, typically fruity or creamy fools and trifles

Serves: 6–8
Difficulty: 1/10
Time taken: 30 minutes

INGREDIENTS

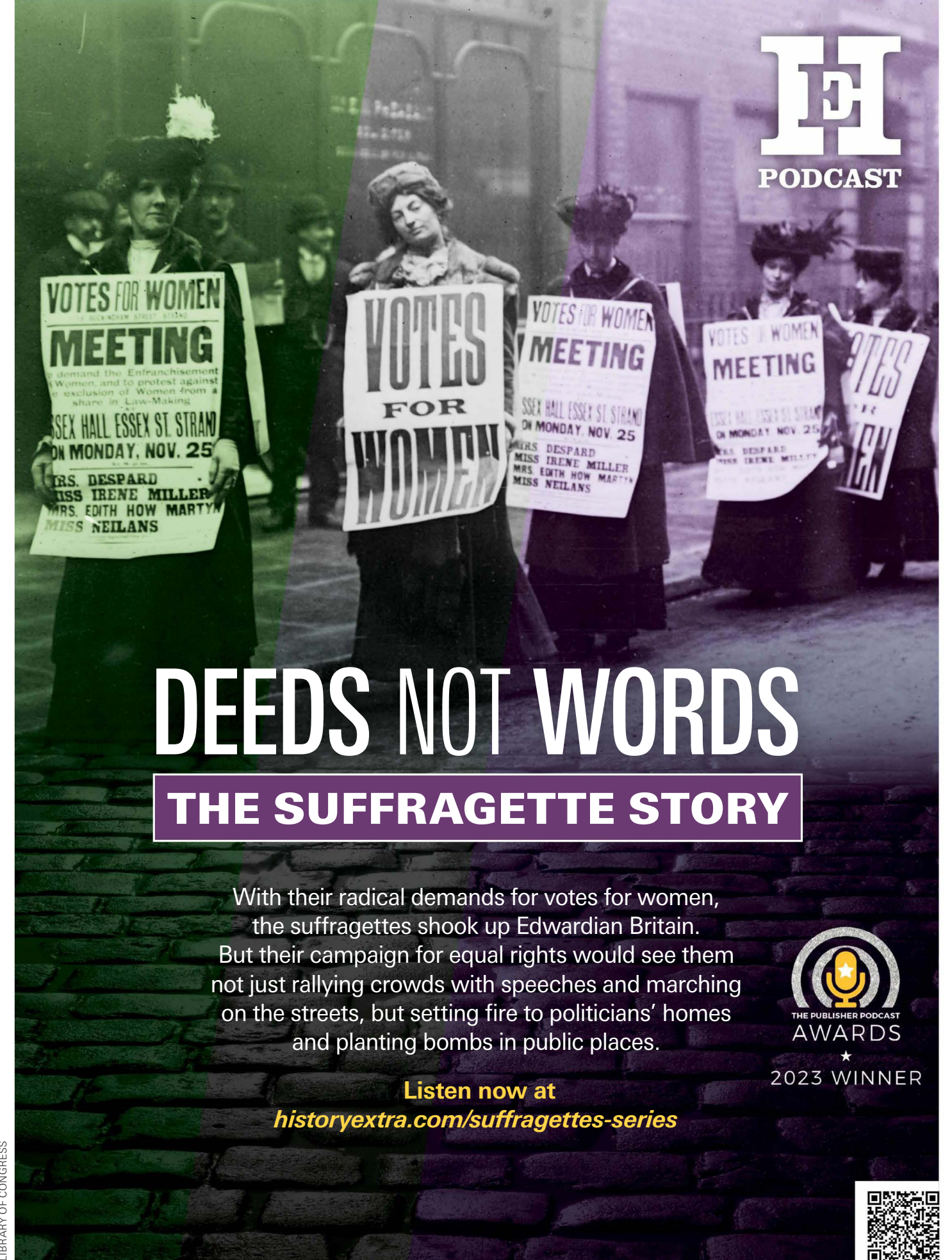
1 small loaf of bread (about 300g)
200ml sherry
5 eggs
1.2 litres double cream
1 tbsp rose water
½ tsp ground mace
½ tsp grated nutmeg
100g sugar

METHOD

1. Cut the bread into thin slices. Soak them in the sherry in the bottom of a dish for 10 minutes, then drain off excess liquid.
2. Whisk the eggs with the sugar.
3. Mix the cream, rose water and spices in a saucepan on a low heat until simmering.
4. Slowly add the whisked egg mixture, stirring continuously on a low heat for 5–10 minutes to produce a smooth, fairly thick custard.
5. Pour the custard over the bread; allow to cool before serving. **H**



Eleanor Barnett is a food historian at Cardiff University and @Historyeats on Instagram. Her book, *Leftovers: A History of Food Waste and Preservation* (Apollo), is out now



EH
PODCAST

DEEDS NOT WORDS

THE SUFFRAGETTE STORY

With their radical demands for votes for women, the suffragettes shook up Edwardian Britain. But their campaign for equal rights would see them not just rallying crowds with speeches and marching on the streets, but setting fire to politicians' homes and planting bombs in public places.

Listen now at
historyextra.com/suffragettes-series



THE PUBLISHER PODCAST
AWARDS

★
2023 WINNER



A pagan masterpiece

Avebury, a tiny, unassuming Wiltshire village, is home to the largest stone circle in Europe. **DR ONYEKA NUBIA** dives into the sometimes turbulent history of a millennia-old monument that's now a World Heritage site

Stonehenge may get all the love, but just 25 miles away lies another important stone circle: Avebury. If we wind our way through Wiltshire's rolling hills and keep the Marlborough Downs to our east, we find Avebury Henge (bank and ditch) 7 miles from Marlborough and Calne. It is the most impressive of this island's megaliths and the biggest stone circle in Europe. The circular henge is more than a mile long and the ditch is 9 metres deep.

Avebury was probably first occupied by flint workers who walked across Dogger Bank from mainland Europe. But it was not until 3,000–2,400 BC that Neolithic peoples first began to use Sarsen stones to mark this place of veneration. Today, 27 of these 'singing' stones remain, carved from distinctive silicified sandstone, and they punctuate the skyline, casting a shadow on the lowlands and echoing the vibrations around them.

Some of these stones are more than 4 metres high and weigh between 40 and 100 tonnes. The Sarsen stones mark the outer ring of this site and within this are two inner circles – a perfect example of the pagan aesthetic.

Changing fortunes

There should be a place in our consciousness for every one of the 1,200 stone circles on this island. Avebury is now protected by the National Trust and Unesco, and is a World Heritage site, but it has not always been so well protected. During the Iron Age, Avebury was abandoned by local people and only became popular again during the Roman occupation. Ironically, the Romans in their

pagan phase were capable of exhibiting tolerance for the religions they stumbled across. During the early medieval period a village sprouted around the site and Avebury is now home to more than 480 people. In the past, the villagers' relationship to the stones wasn't always benevolent and during the late medieval and early modern periods considerable damage was done to Avebury. Pagan sites were often blamed for societal ills and, out of religious prejudice, some locals began to pull down the stones or repurpose them for the local churches.

A further wave of destruction occurred in the 17th and 18th centuries, as recorded by antiquarians such as John Aubrey and William Stukeley. And in 1833 Henry Browne suggested that human sacrifices took place at Avebury. For the next 80 years, excavations tried in vain to prove it.

It was archaeologist Alexander Keiller who rescued Avebury in the 1930s, purchasing much of the land that it now stands on. Keiller passed the site on to the National Trust in 1943, but some of the damage is irrecoverable and it is unlikely that the roads that dissect the sacred body of this place will ever be rerouted.

Avebury reminds us of Europe's deeply rooted pagan past. This was not trendy kitsch-paganism: the people who built Avebury truly believed in their many-faced Animist divinities. Now locals see Avebury as part of their heritage and it has a footprint on the historical and religious calendar.

During the summer solstice, the sun leaves its mark on Avebury, in a similar way to Stonehenge. This is what draws a quarter of a million visitors to the ancient heart of the ceremonial county. **H**

Dr Onyeka Nubia is assistant professor of history at the University of Nottingham, the presenter of Channel 5's *Walking Victorian Britain* and the author of *England's Other Countrymen: Black Tudor Society* (Bloomsbury, 2022)



For more information, head to nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/wiltshire/avebury

Avebury features an outer ring of standing Sarsen stones, with two smaller rings inside – “a perfect example”, writes Onyeka Nubia, “of the pagan aesthetic”

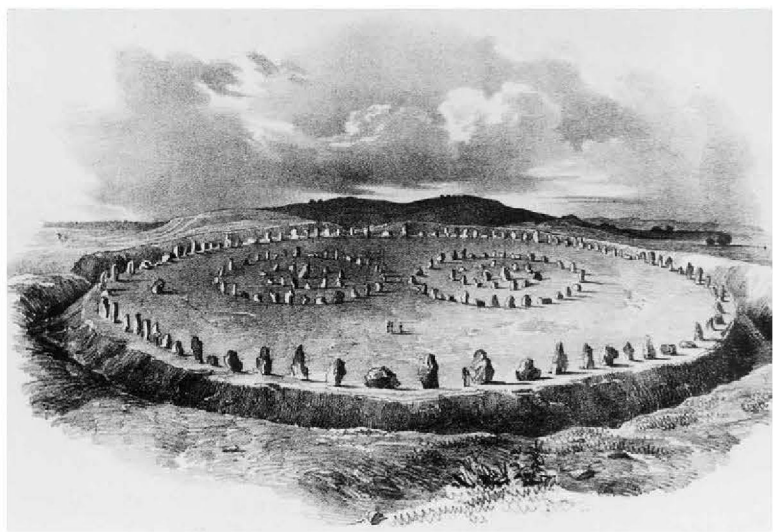


Workers re-erect fallen stones at Avebury, 1939, as part of an extensive programme of excavation and restoration led by Alexander Keiller

// Out of religious prejudice, some local people began to repurpose them for the local churches //



ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES/IGITISED AND RELEASED CC0, AS PART OF THE UKRI FUNDED AVEBURY PAPERS PROJECT. PHOTOGRAPH HELD AT THE NATIONAL TRUST ALEXANDER KEILLER MUSEUM, ACCESSION NUMBER 20004243-002.



Even in the 21st century, Avebury continues to attract large crowds of pagans, druids and the simply curious every solstice

An artist's impression of how the standing stones at Avebury may have looked during their pagan heyday, before centuries of vandalism and looting took their toll

PRIZE CROSSWORD

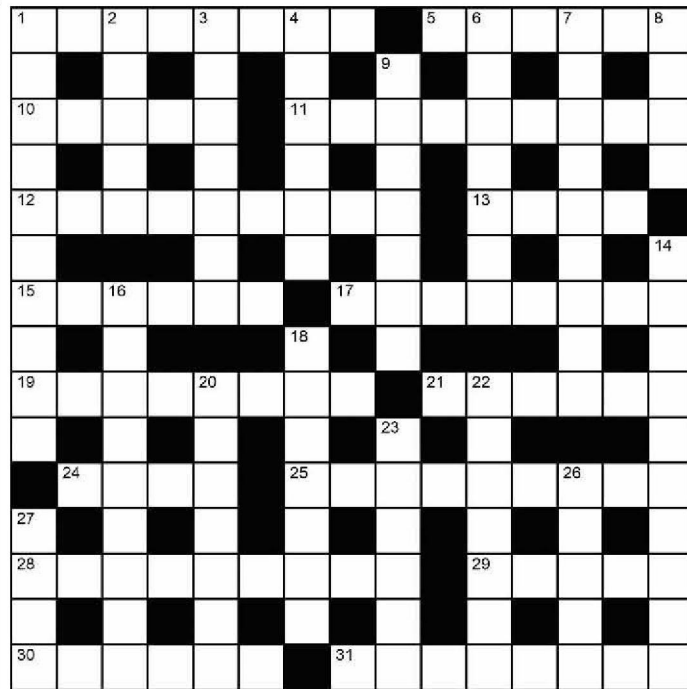
Across

- 1** One of a body of slave-soldiers whose gradual control of Egypt and other states was ended by Muhammad Ali in 1811 [one spelling] (8)
- 5** Where Octavian defeated the combined forces of Mark Antony and Cleopatra (6)
- 10** Ernest ___, influential 19th-century French philosopher and religious historian (5)
- 11** Term applied to the final period of the Stone Age (9)
- 12** ___ II of Aragon, joint ruler of Spain with Queen Isabella (9)
- 13** Unit of area, derived from the Old English for 'tilled field' (4)
- 15** William Henry Fox ___, best known as a British pioneer of photography (6)
- 17** Term for Gorbachev's more open approach to the media etc in the mid-1980s (8)
- 19** William ___, 17th-century Anglican minister and mathematician credited with inventing the slide rule (8)
- 21** John ___, bishop of Worcester, reputed to have co-written the *Eikon Basilike* ('portrait of the king') with Charles I (6)
- 24/9** Her groundbreaking observations of chimpanzees in east Africa brought her public fame in the 1960s (4,7)
- 25** 'Anna Anderson' was a famous false claimant of the identity of this Romanov grand duchess (9)
- 28** James Cook's ship on his first voyage, begun in July 1768, to the Pacific (9)
- 29** Roberto ___, 'God's banker', whose 'suicide' in London in 1982 was later ruled as murder, though no one has been convicted (5)
- 30** ___ people of western Europe in the early Bronze Age, named after their pottery style (6)
- 31** Inhabitants of the empire established by Cyrus the Great in the sixth century BC (8)

Down

- 1** Maid of honour to Elizabeth I, said by some to be the 'Dark Lady' of Shakespeare's sonnets (4,6)
- 2** Hughenden ___, once a home to British prime minister Benjamin Disraeli (5)
- 3** Chinese military leader, Mao's designated successor, who disappeared in 1971 (3,4)
- 4** Claims that Katherine Parr, Henry VIII's wife, was born in this Cumbrian town's castle are probably false (6)
- 6** Neck-to-waist body armour, as worn by ancient Roman officers, for example (7)

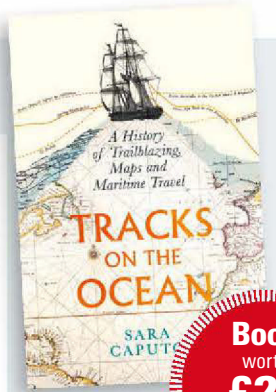
Which author and playwright is best known for *Peter Pan*? (23 down)



Which British photography pioneer created this image? (15 across)

- 7** His *Berlin Stories*, set in the Weimar period, inspired the musical *Cabaret* (9)
- 8** British parliamentary symbol of royal authority dating to the reign of Charles II (4)
- 9** See 24 across
- 14** The historic tin-mining areas of Devon and Cornwall (10)
- 16** Mayor of New York after whom an airport was named (2,7)
- 18** The remains of the ancient city of Tyre are located in this Middle Eastern country (7)
- 20** Area around Dublin that was under English control in the late medieval era (3,4)
- 22** Roman literary patron remembered for his correspondence with Cicero (7)
- 23** Surname of the author best known as the creator of *Peter Pan* (6)
- 26** Roman general, victor of the first full-scale civil war in Roman history (5)
- 27** Sidney and Beatrice ___, founders of the London School of Economics in the late 19th century (4)

Compiled by **Eddie James**



Book worth **£25** for 5 winners

Tracks on the Ocean

By Sara Caputo

What can a few simple lines drawn on a map tell us about the exploits of history's most famous explorers? In her second book, Sara Caputo retraces the routes followed by Magellan, Cook and more, revealing how their voyages of discovery and conquest reshaped our perception of the world.

HOW TO ENTER

- Open to residents of the UK (& Channel Islands). Post entries to **BBC History Magazine, August 2024 Crossword, PO Box 501, Leicester, LE94 0AA** or email them to **August2024@historycomps.co.uk** by 5pm on 31 July 2024.
- Entrants must supply full name, address and phone number. The winners will be the first correct entries drawn at random after the closing time. Winners' names will appear in the October 2024 issue. By entering, participants agree to be bound by the terms and conditions shown in full in the box below. Immediate Media Company Ltd (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) will use personal details in accordance with the Immediate Privacy Policy at <https://policies.immediate.co.uk/privacy>
- Immediate Media Company Ltd (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) would love to send you newsletters, together with special offers and other promotions. If you would not like to receive these, please write 'NO INFO' on your entry.
- Branded BBC titles are licensed from or published jointly with BBC Studios (the commercial arm of the BBC). Please tick here ☐ if you'd like to receive regular newsletters, special offers and promotions from BBC Studios by email. Your information will be handled in accordance with the BBC Studios privacy policy: bbcstudios.com/privacy – bbc.com/editorialguidelines/guidance/code-of-conduct

Solution to our June 2024 crossword

Across 1 Habsburg 5 Stocks 9 Ronin 10 Babington 12 Ida B Wells 14 Clyde 15 Imber 17 Steedman 20 Minstrel 21 Likud 23 Evans 25 Durotiges 28 Lindowman 29 Angle 30 Rwanda 31 Achilles

Down 1 Hersilia 2 Banda 3 Ben 4 Rebel 6 Tunic 7 Cutty Sark 8 Sanger 11 Boswell 13 Worms 16 Britannia 17 Serfdom 18 Delft 19 Odysseus 22 Kepler 24 Sword 26 Runic 27 Gogol 29 Ali

Four winners of London by Paul Knox:

Maria Chilvers, Leeds; G Robinson, Poole; Julie Spinks, Stratford-upon-Avon; Andrew Wilson, Greater Manchester

CROSSWORD COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS

- The crossword competition is open to all residents of the UK (& Channel Islands), aged 18 or over, except Immediate Media Company London Limited employees or contractors, and anyone connected with the competition or their direct family members. By entering, participants agree to be bound by these terms and conditions and that their name and county may be released if they win. Only one entry permitted per person.
- The closing date and time is as shown under How to Enter, above. Entries received after that will not be considered. Entries cannot be returned. Entrants must supply full name, address and daytime phone number. Immediate Media Company (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) will not publish your personal details or provide them to anyone without permission. Read more about the Immediate Privacy Policy at [immediatemediacompany.co.uk/privacy-policy/](https://policies.immediate.co.uk/privacy-policy/)
- The winning entrants will be the first correct entries drawn at random after the closing time. The prize and number of winners will be as shown on the Crossword page. There is no cash alternative and the prize will not be transferable. Immediate Media Company London decision is final and no correspondence relating to the competition will be entered into. The winners will be notified by post within 20 days of the close of the competition. The name and county of residence of the winners will be published in the magazine within two months of the closing date. If the winner is unable to be contacted within one month of the closing date, Immediate Media Company London Limited reserves the right to offer the prize to a runner-up.
- Immediate Media Company London Limited reserves the right to amend these terms and conditions, or to cancel, alter or amend the promotion at any stage, if deemed necessary in its opinion, or if circumstances arise outside of its control. The promotion is subject to the laws of England.



**September issue on sale
1 August 2024**



Masters of illusion

Robert Hutton on the deception campaigns used by British forces in the Second World War



Art for women

Ellie Cawthorne reveals how the suffragettes waged a propaganda war in their quest for the vote



Young guns

Alice Loxton explores the teenage years of some of history's most important characters

King on the run

Nathen Amin chronicles Henry VII's early years as his enemies circled around him



A new England

Caroline Burt and Richard Partington argue that the 13th and 14th centuries were pivotal in the development of the English state

A shared history

Kerry Brown highlights how Britain and China have influenced one another over the past 400 years



MY HISTORY HERO

Singer, songwriter and actress Ruby Turner chooses

Sister Rosetta Tharpe

1915–73



Sister Rosetta Tharpe performing around 1938. "She was a musical prodigy with a distinctive way of singing," says Ruby Turner

IN PROFILE

Sister Rosetta Tharpe (born Rosetta Nubin) was an American singer, songwriter and guitarist who's been dubbed 'the God-mother of rock'n'roll'. She found fame in the 1930s and 1940s, becoming gospel music's first great recording star. Her singing style and guitar virtuosity also influenced early rock'n'roll stars such as Little Richard and Elvis Presley, as well as British blues guitarists in the 1960s. She died in 1973, aged 58, three years after suffering a stroke. She was posthumously inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame in 2007.

/// People don't realise how much the likes of Elvis Presley and Little Richard owe to her – Chuck Berry was just one long impersonation! ///

When did you first hear about Tharpe?

I heard the song 'Up Above My Head' when I was 16, though at the time I didn't realise it was Sister Rosetta singing [with Marie Knight]. It was only later – after I performed another of her songs, 'Didn't it Rain', while touring with Jools Holland, who's also a fan – that I realised I'd been introduced to her music in my teens.

Ruby Turner MBE has worked with artistes including Mick Jagger, and had a US number 1 R&B hit with 'It's Gonna Be Alright' in 1990. She's sung on *Jools' Annual Hootenanny* on BBC Two since 2007, and is touring with Jools Holland (joolsholland.com)

What kind of woman was she? The daughter of cotton pickers, Rosetta was born into poverty in Arkansas. By the time she was six, she had joined her singer mother as a performer in a travelling evangelical troupe. She was a musical prodigy with a distinctive way of singing, and by her teens had become the 'main event'. Music was the saving grace for a lot of black Americans at that time, and Rosetta – she took the surname Tharpe from her first husband – was just born to do what she did. Sadly, for a period after the war she rather disappeared from view, which was a crying shame.

What made her a hero? She was such a trailblazer for black female artistes in the show-business world, and influenced so many of the rock'n'roll stars who followed in her wake and achieved fame. A lot of people don't realise just how much artistes like Elvis Presley and Little Richard, among others, owe to her – Chuck Berry was just one long impersonation! I also admire her for the strength and fortitude she displayed in forging a musical career at a time when America was such a segregated, racist society.

What was her finest hour? Possibly the concert she gave at a disused railway station in the rain in Manchester in 1964. It was recorded by Granada Television and attended by the likes of Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Keith Richards, who have also cited her as an influence. Take a look at the video of her that day – that's a woman who's armed and dangerous [musically]. The way she twanged that guitar!

Is there anything that you don't particularly admire about her? Nothing comes to mind. I just wish she'd taken better care of herself – she died so young.

Does she deserve to be better known today? Definitely – so I'm delighted to hear that a campaign has been launched to put up a blue plaque to commemorate her legendary concert in Manchester in 1964. That will hopefully introduce her to a new generation and remind the world of her musical significance.

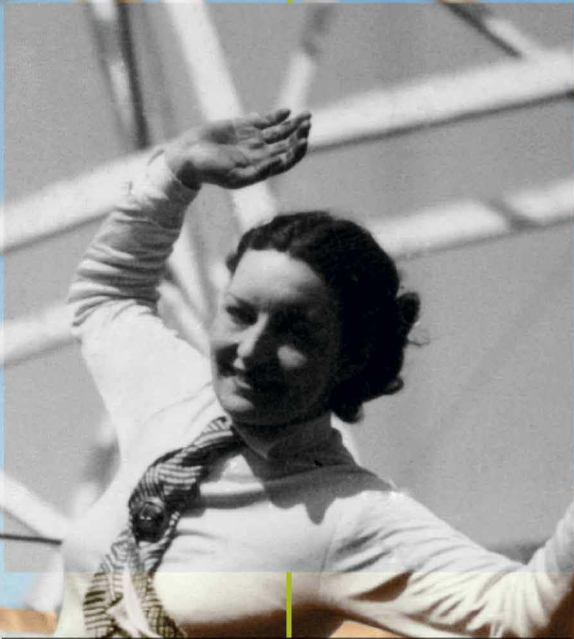
What would you ask her if you could meet her? I'd just say: "Well done, sister! Thank you for your tenacity and your fire!" **H**

Ruby Turner was talking to York Membery



In the BBC Radio 4 series **Great Lives**, guests discuss inspirational figures: bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qxs8





DISCOVER THE WHOLE PICTURE

When you explore your family tree, you find names, dates and places. But it's the extra details that truly reveal your family story.

Ancestry has a huge range of historical records, and with an average of two million added every day, there's always more to discover. So even when you think you know your family, they can keep surprising you.

 **ancestry**
Bring your backstory to life™

**Do you have a
fascinating family
story to share?**

We'd love to hear about
your discoveries, email us at
yourstory@ancestry.co.uk

May Record Highlights*

Haute-Saône, France, Births Marriages, and Deaths,
1603-1929 – **UPDATED**

Australia and New Zealand, Newspapers.com™
Obituary Index, 1800s-current – **UPDATED**

Rhode Island, U.S., Newspapers.com™ Stories and
Events Index – **NEW**

*Record collections subject to change.



PETER SOMMER
TRAVELS

"A perfect combination of
intellectual, aesthetic, sensual and
physical experiences."

EXPERT-LED ARCHAEOLOGICAL & CULTURAL TOURS FOR SMALL GROUPS



7 TIMES UK TOUR OPERATOR OF THE YEAR

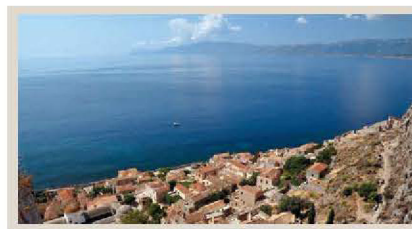
ONE OF THE WORLD'S "TOP TEN LEARNING RETREATS"
- NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC



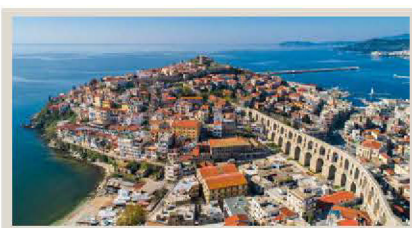
EXPLORING CRETE



EXPLORING SICILY



EXPLORING THE PELOPONNESE



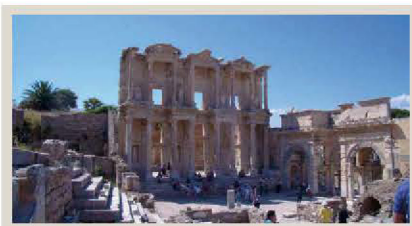
EXPLORING MACEDONIA



WALKING AND CRUISING
WESTERN LYCIA



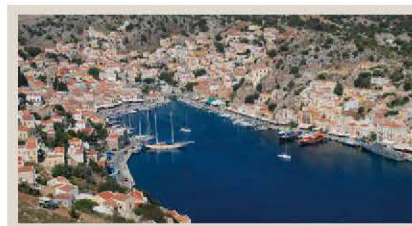
CRUISING DALMATIA
FROM SPLIT TO DUBROVNIK



CRUISING TO EPHEBUS



EXPLORING HADRIAN'S WALL



CRUISING THE DODECANESE

Visit: petersommer.com

Call: 01600 888 220

Email: info@petersommer.com

ESCORTED ARCHAEOLOGICAL TOURS,
GULET CRUISES AND
PRIVATE CHARTERS

